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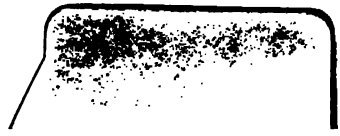

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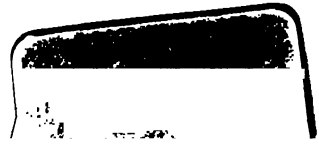

BUSH-LIFE IN QUEENSLAND

BUSH-LIFE IN QUEENSLAND

OR

JOHN WEST'S COLONIAL EXPERIENCES

BY

A. C. GRANT

NEW EDITION

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXXII

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TO

MY BELOVED MOTHER

WHO AT AN ADVANCED AGE CROSSED THE SEAS TO

ASSIST HER SONS IN SUBDUING THE WILDERNESS,

AND IN REMEMBRANCE OF

HER DEVOTION, COURAGE, AND STEADFASTNESS

IN EVERY TRIAL AND DIFFICULTY,

THIS BOOK

IS DUTIFULLY INSCRIBED.

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BUSH-LIFE IN QUEENSLAND.

CHAPTER I.

JOHN WEST SETS OUT ON HIS TRAVELS.

THE good ship Marie Hamilton, an Aberdeen clipper, 700 tons burthen, bound for Sydney, is forging her way down the Channel with a fair wind in her top-sails. The pilot has gone on shore, and with his departure the last adieu to England has been spoken. The green slopes of Sussex are sinking over the quarter. Beachy is already behind, and it is doubtful if the passengers can catch the Needles before nightfall. Most of them are too full of the parting to speak much. Remembrances of friends left behind crowd their memories, and the receding shores give a point to the poignancy of their parting regrets. To-morrow it will be different, when there is only the wide sea to greet the eye on coming on deck. Then men's minds must turn perforce to the new land whither Fortune has beckoned them with smiles that, in too many cases, may turn out to have been delusive. Then the life of the voyage will have begun: friendships will be formed, the seeds of enmities sown, and the social organisation of the floating microcosm will enter upon its three months' course of development.

John West leans over the side; and as the lights fade in the loom of the darkening coast, his whole life seems to come up before him and fade also into the past. He thought of the fond mother who had been called away too soon, before she could see her boy ripening into manhood; of the father whose naturally feeble constitution had scarcely rallied from the shock of his wife's death, but whose tender affection and care had been exerted to their utmost, so that John might never feel his loss. Though of a good family, the Rev. Ambrose West had been only a poor curate in a manufacturing town, who had all his life to struggle with poverty, and who had been indebted for the means of giving his son a good education to the bounty of a female relative, who had accidentally seen the handsome young lad, and had bequeathed his father, in trust for him, a sum of £1500. How he might best turn this legacy to his boy's account was a thought ever present in Mr West's mind; and his anxiety was quickened all the more by a consciousness that his own end was rapidly approaching. That his son should not have to live like himself—a penniless scholar—he was determined; and his acquaintance with an old schoolfellow who had made a fortune in Australia led him to think of a career in that country for John. This gentleman, Mr Cosgrove, who at first had been inclined to throw cold water on the clergyman's scheme, readily undertook to be John West's patron when he heard that the lad would have some small capital to invest in the colony.

"Australia is the finest field in the world for a young man with a little money," Cosgrove had said with enthusiasm. "You buy your sheep or cattle, travel them on to a magnificent country, lease it from the Government for a mere trifle, and in a few years your sheep and cattle will have multiplied six or eight times over, and you are a made man. Mere accumulation will make you rich. You live the life

of a prince,—out on the green downs all day, riding through the forests, and home at night to your comfortable bunk, turn in, and you sleep like a top."

This prospect did much to reassure Mr West of his son's future, and he could look forward to the end, which was now close at hand, with a feeling of more cheerfulness. There were many points in Mr Cosgrove's character that did not recommend themselves to Mr West; but he could make allowances for his neighbour's roughness and vulgarity, as the crust under which lay a spirit of honesty and fair dealing. When Mr West died, John was scarcely seventeen, and he at once passed under the guardianship of Mr Cosgrove. Neither John West nor his father had much knowledge of Mr Cosgrove's colonial career, or of the way in which he had accumulated his fortune. But while John is thus leaning over the side of the Marie Hamilton watching the night settle down upon the bank of gloom which is all that is by this time left of the English coast, we shall give a few particulars regarding the man who is now our adventurer's guardian.

Mr Cosgrove had, as a boy, been a schoolfellow of Mr West, and had gone out to California when the discovery of gold first attracted a rush of emigration in that direction. He had made money, but had been victimised by a partner of superior cleverness if not of more honesty than himself. Attracted by the glowing accounts of the wealth of New South Wales which followed the famous discovery of gold by Hargraves in that colony, Cosgrove was next drawn towards this new El Dorado, taking with him about nine hundred pounds—the proceeds of his Californian enterprise. In the new colony his previous experience stood him in good stead; and after engaging in many operations of land-jobbing, money-advancing, and other dealings of doubtful character, he soon found himself fairly on the road to wealth. He had married meanwhile; but

his wife had died and left him with one son—a boy called Ralf; and soon after, Cosgrove once more looked around him for a mate by whose means he might manage to raise himself another step in the social ladder.

His choice fell upon a young widow lady of good family though rather slender means. Her husband, a young and promising Government official, had been accidentally killed by a fall from his horse, leaving his young wife and her little girl Ruth, an infant in arms, to make the most of the small sum he had been able to save. She was received in the best society which the capital of New South Wales afforded; and in marrying her, the wily squatter looked forward to a more extended field of labour than he had as yet been able to operate upon. His wealth, address, and rather presentable appearance, procured for him a favourable termination to a suit which, as far as the poor lady knew, she had every reason to regard as a desirable one, but which could only have an unfavourable ending. Not long after the marriage, he induced through his wife, a cousin of hers, a young man of considerable wealth, to emigrate to Australia. Cosgrove had shortly before this sold his original property and bought another, much larger, chiefly on bills, his money having been mysteriously disposed of, no one knew how. His name could have procured advances from the banks to an almost indefinite amount. He had laid a trap for some one, and his wife's cousin walked into it as soon as he was asked.

Greed of gold, and Cosgrove's specious arguments, induced him to place a large amount of cash in the farmer's hands as part payment of a half-share in the station, which had never been paid for; and the utterly inexperienced one hugged himself in the expectation of untold wealth. To his intense astonishment, he was awakened from this delusion about a year afterwards by his partner, who coolly announced

himself a ruined man; and finished up by informing him that he could not meet his bills—that the mortgagees had foreclosed, and were now about to take possession. The unsuspecting youth at first thought a joke was intended, and some time elapsed before he actually realised the ghastly truth.

"Do you mean to say that the station was not yours when I bought half of it?"

"Well, it was mine to a certain extent. I bought it on advances from the banks, hoping to clear off the debt by degrees. Depreciation in wool, interest and compound interest, have not only prevented that, but it has put me some thousands in debt; and as I told you, the mortgagees are sending up to take possession."

"But they shan't get possession," returned the young man, alarmed and growing angry; "I own an interest in the property. I won't be swindled out of my money. Let them pay that back to me, and I'll go. I hold your bond of partnership. I dare them to set foot on the place while I am here."

"Listen," said the other; "you had better destroy that little paper."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I shall publish it in every newspaper. Though you have married my cousin, I'll proclaim your treachery everywhere. I'll——"

"Hold on," rejoined his quondam partner, serenely surveying his victim; "I have no money—overdrawn my account long ago—every one knows that. I owe about £10,000. The mortgagees are willing to give me a clearance when I give up the station. Should it come to their ears that you are my self-acknowledged partner, you will find yourself compelled to pay the remaining money you possess into their hands to liquidate my debts. Now hold your tongue, and burn your bond—first loss is best loss."

The force of this argument struck the dismayed young man so strongly, that, feeling himself quite

helpless, though raging inwardly, he submitted to his fate.

Cosgrove retired for some time into private life, but before long emerged again, brighter and evidently richer, as the possessor of a station in the more northern portion of New South Wales, which subsequently came to be known as the colony of Queensland.

In his new property he may be supposed to have succeeded; for on his return to England, after the death of his second wife, whose gentle heart had never been able to get the better of her husband's unscrupulousness, he was apparently a wealthy and prosperous gentleman. In Mr Cosgrove's house John had spent a few weeks after his father's death, and had learned to like Ruth—who had all the sweetness and affection of her mother's character—and to thoroughly detest Ralf, who, to a naturally vicious disposition, developed among the rough characters of a bush-station, had added still more objectionable qualities, caught up from the society of stable-helpers and betting-men, since his arrival in England. John West's intercourse with the young Australian had been far from pleasant, and he had had on one occasion to enforce good manners upon him by a sound drubbing. But Mr Cosgrove was anxious that he should start; and the days of mourning were scarcely accomplished when John found that his passage had been taken on a Sydney ship; and he himself was hurried off, in company with his dog Spot—the gift of a lad who was Ruth's groom, and whom John had protected at his own personal peril from the tyranny of her brother. He was furnished with a letter to Mr Cosgrove's superintendent at Ipswich, in Queensland, and with a draft, payable to himself, on Messrs Bond and Foreclose, Mr Cosgrove's agents in the capital of New South Wales. As for his money, Mr Cosgrove had undertaken to invest the sum in the way most profit-

able for giving him a start when he had learned his duties.

And so John looked over the side of the Marie Hamilton, and thought of his dead father and of Ruth, to whom he felt all the fervour of a boyish attachment, and of Cosgrove and Ralf, of the old life that he was leaving, and of the wonders of the new world that was before him, until the light was swung from the mast, and the watch was set, and passengers were beginning to go below and make for their berths. The wide ocean was around, night was above, and Old England was now far away on the lee.

CHAPTER II.

ON BOARD THE MARIE HAMILTON.

THE chief mate of the Marie Hamilton was a hearty, coarse, pushing man, and a good sailor. He soon put John in the way of getting things in order, and managed, as there were not many passengers, to let him have a cabin to himself; and he also extended his protection to Spot, for which John was very grateful.

How new were these experiences! how many things were to be learnt! Everything he saw filled him with surprise; and next morning John, who had never lived on the sea-coast, was aghast as he watched the active sailors swarm up aloft and shake out the white sails. There was a stiff breeze blowing, and poor John experienced all the customary sensations.

He lay aft, dreadfully sick, and could not be prevailed upon to move. The sailors, who every now and then came aft in a party to haul on the braces as the ship was put about, walked over him, but he did not mind it. One of them drew him a little on one side, but it was like moving a corpse—in fact, John would not have minded being a corpse just at that moment. The steward had been up several times with offers of food, which his soul abhorred, and now brought round a blanket with which he covered the wretched youth. The warmth did John good, and towards midnight he managed to crawl down and get into his bunk. In a few days, however, these feelings were a thing of the past, and

the warm, sunny skies began to exercise their genial influence on our young traveller. How delicious to move about in the month of January with summer clothing; to bask in the warm rays of the sun, watching the snowy-winged sea-birds poising themselves on the yards! Now they dash like a streak of lightning round the quarter of the vessel, circling gracefully up into the air again; and now they dropped on the water, falling gradually behind, until one could scarcely note the tiny white speck on the boundless blue of the rising wave. How charming to watch the minute "Portugee men-o'-war," each little bark cruising on its own account, and commissioned in the Admiralty Court of Nature, in the name of Nature's God! How delightful at night to lean on the quarter-rail and look over into the wild, whirling eddies of dark, deep water, sparkling with phosphorescent fire; or to note the ship's bow as it ploughed its way through the solemn main, furrowing its track in living fire! How glorious to sit and watch the golden sunset, the sky at first fretted with a network of gorgeously tinted cumuli, then dissolving into less bright but more delicate and not less beautiful shades of colour, till at last the great light sinks — a living, burning, glowing sphere — behind the vast waste of waters, to give place to the "gentle Lady Moon," which, rising "full-orbed in silvery majesty," casts her fairy-like enchanted light in a bright chain athwart the darkened rippling sea, until, rising on high, she watches with "her silent eye" the universe below, causing the masts and cordage to stand out in alternate light and shadow! What a glamour steals over the heart of man at such a time! what a desire for solitude, for communion with one's own heart — the hour of faith, of prayer, of love! Who of those that have gone down to the sea in great ships have not felt the sad, inexplicable yearning of the heart for the

higher, purer life, when watching the star-sown heavens, or contrasting the insignificance of themselves and their bark and the huge immensity of space around them?

"The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." But "the heavens declare His handiwork."

John West felt all this. He thought he could never tire of the voyage; but after a time, the continual sameness and monotony became irksome.

There were a few other passengers, but none with whom he cared to become intimate. One was a young man of the name of Boyle, on his way out, like himself, to learn sheep-farming in Australia. Boyle had rather exalted notions of his destiny, for he frequently informed any who would listen to him that he was going to manage a large station belonging to his uncle. The young man had a natural taste for low company, and his greatest pleasure lay in playing cards with the sailors in the forecastle.

There was also a travelling bagman for some London firm on board—a Jew named Cohen.

It so happened that Boyle had in some manner made himself obnoxious to the "son of Moses;" and one night, when he was returning from the forecastle, a bucket of bilge-water, emptied on him by an unseen hand in a lofty position, drenched him to the skin. Boyle vowed vengeance. The perpetrator of the trick was not to be discovered, but in his own mind he was convinced that to Cohen the debt was due. This little affair happened when the Marie Hamilton was about crossing the line; and the weather being very hot, the passengers were accustomed to go forward before sunrise in order to bathe, the water being played upon them through the hose of the fire-engine.

A few mornings after Boyle's little adventure, the passengers went as usual for their early refresher; and West, who was first ready, was about to advance, when a meaning look and wink from the man who held the

hose made him draw back. He noticed that this morning the brass nozzle was screwed on to the canvas-pipe, and that two men were working the pump instead of one, as was customary. Cohen now stepped forward —he was a big, stout, fat man—completely undressed. The two sailors at the engine set to work with all their might, the third directed the nozzle, and in an instant the unfortunate bagman was covered from head to foot with tar. In vain did he turn his back, he only received on it the remainder of the dose which had been ingeniously concealed in the nozzle. Consternation was depicted on the faces of some, while others greeted the unhappy victim with shouts of laughter. No one enjoyed the affair more than his enemy Boyle.

But he laughed too loud. Cohen's eye settled on him. Suspicion flashed across his mind like lightning, and rushing at the unsuspecting and wholly naked youth, he seized him in his arms, and rubbed himself all over him, causing the bystanders to shriek with hysterical laughter. The infuriated young man struck out right and left, a successful blow lighting on and "bunging up" the eye of his antagonist, who retaliated with great spirit, until the combatants resembled a pair of North American Indians. Just then the chief officer came up. His appearance was a signal for the sailors, who were looking on with pretended amazement depicted on their faces, to disperse.

A few words in his rough, imperious tone of voice sufficed to part the coloured gentlemen, who now became alive to the intense absurdity of their position. Boyle made his way in safety to the cook's galley, where, with the assistance of some of the men, he got slushed down and cleansed.

Cohen, however, was not so fortunate. His cabin was one of the stern state-rooms, and to reach it he had to pass through the whole length of the saloon.

It was obviously impossible to put on clothes, and nothing remained for it but to clear the coast and to make a desperate rush. So turning to John, he begged him to act the part of advanced-guard and reconnoitre ahead. John returned with the welcome news that no one was to be seen, whereupon Cohen made a frantic effort; but, alas! "the best-laid schemes of mice and men," as Burns says, "gang aft a-glee." He had barely got half-way down the companion when he was met by a middle-aged married lady from Ireland, of the name of Sullivan—who was returning with her husband to the colonies—and a Miss MacFagg, a sentimental, long-bodied Scotch maiden of forty, with a partly lackadaisical, partly sanctimonious, expression of visage, and a long thin head, sparsely covered with a crop of wiry sandy hair, who was on her way out to a relative in Sydney.

They had emerged from their cabins to enjoy the morning air just as West left the saloon, and in consequence a meeting on the companion was the result. Owing to the impetus, caused by the rate at which he was travelling, Cohen hurriedly swept past Mrs Sullivan, liberally besmearing her hands—which she had stretched out in front of her to protect herself—with the sticky pigment which covered his own skin, and almost rushed into the arms of Miss MacFagg, who was a step or two lower down, and who saluted him with a piercing shriek. In vain he turned to fly; his self-possession—bewildered as he was by the shouts of Mrs Sullivan, who kept bawling at the top of her voice, "Murder! savages! the bloody, dhirty villyian, he's ruinated my dhresh intirely!" and hewing at him with her sun-shade, and the shrieks of Miss MacFagg, who on her knees entreated him to spare her innocence and her scalp—completely deserted him. In vain, covering his face with his hands, he endeavoured to pass on either side of his strong-minded Irish adversary. She set to him with the pre-

cision of a dancing-mistress, until a heavy and well-directed blow from the sun-shade sent him rolling down the cuddy-stairs into the saloon, bringing the terrified Miss MacFagg along with him.

The whole scene had not occupied a minute, and John was the only bystander who had witnessed it. The other passengers and stewards, who had hurried to the spot on hearing the noise, had arrived only in time to see the half-maddened Jew disappear in his cabin, and they now surrounded West in order to get an explanation, and the saloon resounded with uproarious merriment as Cohen's awkward situation became known. Miss MacFagg retired to her cabin, from which she did not emerge until the afternoon of next day; but the dauntless Mrs Sullivan appeared at breakfast, at which meal she narrated the adventure to the much-amused skipper, who absolutely shrieked as she finished by saying, "The dhirty blackgyard! I dhrew out and I hit him acrass the shouldthers and knocked him dhown."

This and one or two other little occurrences served to break the tediousness of the trip, which was beginning to tell upon all, especially the more experienced travellers; and the near approach to Australian shores was hailed with delight, and by none more than John. Why was he glad? He had no friends awaiting him. He did not know, he never even asked himself the question; but the feeling of delight was almost ecstatic as the glittering coast shone under their lee; and universal enthusiasm existed as the Marie Hamilton ran close in, affording her passengers and crew a view of the beautiful panorama of wooded hills and blue mountain-peaks, and grassy slopes running down to the open sandy beaches or rock-bound shores of the sea. "That's 'Kiama,'" said the skipper to John. John did not know what "Kiama" was—he had never heard the name before. He stood leaning on the rail, watching the shore, and

lost in thought. In imagination he peopled those green hills with a savage, bloodthirsty race, whose ancestors had gone on the war-path, and followed the chase over those silent valleys and rugged mountains for hundreds, ay, perhaps thousands, of years. He thought how, when all Christendom was convulsed with strife and war, the inhabitants of these dark, rolling forests had lived on calmly, pursuing their own primitive mode of life. What they were at the time of the advent of our Saviour, that they were still. It had wrought no change for them. Their life was what it had been, it might be, in Moses' time, or still further back in the obscurer ages of the world's history. It seemed almost like paying a visit to one of the planets, approaching a country whose people were utterly ignorant of the commonest European information.

As the day wore on and the glorious sunshine came to an end, bets were freely offered and taken as to the hour of arrival at Sydney Heads.

The moon was at the full, and the Marie Hamilton sailed merrily onward,—just as if the "Sydney girls" had hold of the tow-rope, as the boatswain cheerily remarked. About ten o'clock in the evening they passed Botany Bay, and soon the perpendicular cliffs which line the shore between it and the entrance to the Cove towered above them in the clear moonlight—the abrupt, rugged harshness of the rocky wall seeming more awful as each lofty headland was thrown forward into bold relief by the dark-shadowed clefts and chasms behind. They passed the dreadful Gap, the scene of a shipwreck, the harrowing details of which will never be forgotten by the inhabitants of Sydney; and shortly afterwards the pilot came on board, and the Marie Hamilton entered the Heads and cast anchor for the night.

But whose pen can describe the fairy-like beauty of the scene next morning, when the steam-tug towed

their floating home up the glorious harbour to Sydney, the Queen of the Southern Seas?

The clearness of the atmosphere, and the deep blue of the sky, in which blazed a semi-tropical sun; the smooth water; the charming little coves and sheltered bays; the wooded shores; the splendid villas crowning the rising slopes and embosomed in luxuriant verdure; the trim little yachts; and the noble aspect of the city from the harbour, which was crowded with steamers and ships, a perfect forest of masts rising close to the shore,—enchanted John beyond measure.

Garden Island and Pinchgut are passed, and the towers of Government House rise imposingly over the waters of Farm Cove, where two or three men-of-war lie serenely at anchor, their union-jacks hanging lazily from the sterns of the vessels; while the beautiful Botanic Gardens lend a tropical character to the whole which absolutely transports the beholder. No wonder the Sydney people are proud of their City by the Sea, for there are few spots more lovely.

John soon got his things on shore; and having fixed on lodgings, he went for a stroll. He found out Mr Cosgrove's agents, Messrs Bond and Foreclose, who honoured his draft, treating him, however, with a business-like off-handedness which rather took him aback; for he had expected, from the familiar way in which Mr Cosgrove spoke of them, that a friend of his would be a person of some consideration with them. A walk about town filled him with surprise. The puggaree-encircled hats and helmets were to him a novel sight. The Chinese stores in the lower part of George Street, and the diggers (in coloured flannel shirts and long boots), some of whom he saw loitering about the booking-office of a coaching firm, were also new and strange; and he listened in puzzled wonder to the quick sharp cries of the omnibus cads as they rapidly uttered a string of foreign-sounding native names.

The long wooden drinking-troughs for horses outside the doors of many of the suburban inns, gave an air of rustic simplicity to the long one-storeyed buildings, with which the presence in town of innumerable horsemen from the neighbouring country was quite in keeping.

At the same time, John was much impressed with the architectural beauty of some of the newer streets and public edifices, and with the evidences of wealth and prosperity which greeted him everywhere.

He found his way to the office of the Australian Steam Navigation Company, and having taken his passage for Brisbane, Moreton Bay, he returned to his lodgings. On the evening of the next day he went on board the S.S. Telegraph, and soon afterwards the countless lights of Sydney twinkled in the gloom behind them and were lost to view.

Here he met a different class of people from any he had hitherto come in contact with, and he did not at first exactly know what to make of them. There were a number of stout, bearded, and very much bronzed men, who looked like gentlemen: and yet there was an off-handedness and air of recklessness about some of them which he had never perceived in those with whom he had associated at home; and he noticed that the hands of nearly all, although in some instances decorated with rings, were rough and coarse. They appeared to have much to say; and from the familiarity with which they treated one another, John at first inclined to think that they must be members of what he had heard termed the swell-mob. Occasionally a few words of their conversation came to his ears; and the expressions "new country," "account sales," "horses and cattle," "pound a-head all round," "up at my place," &c., reminded him of Mr Cosgrove's conversation, and he made up his mind that these must be Queensland squatters returning after a trip to Sydney. When John in the course of time came

to know this class better, he found that among them were to be met numbers of men of first-rate education, gentlemanly manners, and high principles, as well also as those of a rougher stamp; but nearly all were shrewd, practical men, devoted to their independent bush-life, and bearing about with them a frankness which seemed born of the rough-and-ready stirring life they led. There were also a few younger men of the same stamp, some of them looking rather unwell, as if recovering from the effects of Sydney dissipation. John's fellow-passenger Boyle was also among the number. He had managed to introduce himself, or had been introduced, to a circle of ladies, and was evidently affording them amusement, as could be seen by the endeavours which some of the younger ones made to draw him out, and the merriment which followed each sally. There were also some who looked like city business men, and one or two travelling bagmen. The passengers seemed to agree very well, and there did not appear to be any of the stiffness which characterises English travelling at home. The captain, a polite, highly educated seaman, made himself agreeable to all, and was especially attentive to the ladies and children. John mentioned Mr Cosgrove's name; and the captain, who knew everybody, was quite interested, and inquired in the most particular way after Ruth, who was, he said, a charming child, and a great friend of his. The table was well supplied, and the scent of pine-apples seemed to pervade the saloon: the whole surroundings called to John's mind descriptions he had read of steamer-travelling in the Southern States of America. Two days' rapid steaming along the coast brought them in sight of Stradbroke Island; and shortly afterwards, passing several islands, they entered the mouth of the Brisbane river. The shores were low and uninteresting at first, and devoid of all life, except where, here and there, a group of native companions stalked solemnly or played fantastically

on the mud among the mangroves; but as the steamer tore the placid waters, and forced her course onward, the banks gradually rose, and became densely covered with vegetation of a tropical character. The river bent and twisted in many a romantic winding; and as each corner was turned, a still more beautiful scene than the last lay before the travellers. The long reaches of deep, calm water, fringed with dense groves of plantains and bananas or tall graceful bamboos, delighted John's gaze.

Here and there were passed beautiful verandaed cottages covered with creepers, situated in the midst of luxuriant gardens and orange-groves, from which little jetties or boat-stairs led down to the water's edge. Numerous buildings announced the approach to the city, as it is called, of Brisbane. The steamer was soon made fast alongside the jetty, and it being a moist wet day, there were few people to witness its arrival.

John got his things ashore, and set off to find accommodation. Both the principal hotels were full, and he turned away in search of a third, where he was fortunate enough to secure a small room.

It rained all day, and when towards evening it ceased for a time, and our "new chum" went out to explore, he was astonished to find that the city was almost entirely built of wood, and that it was scarcely bigger than many villages at home. Since then a great change for the better has taken place in the capital of Queensland, both in size and architecture. He returned to an early supper and bed, but, alas! not to sleep. He suffered the tortures of the Inquisition from a numerous and active body of mosquitoes, who, having discovered the treat awaiting them in the person of a new arrival, obstinately defied all his efforts to dislodge them from the positions they had taken up within the curtains, and prosecuted their investigations with the most pertinacious perseverance,

discovering the tenderest portions of his body with a scientific skill which said much for their vast experience and interest in the matter on hand.

Towards morning he fell into a feverish sleep, on awaking from which he resolved that from Brisbane he should depart that very day: so having finished breakfast, he had his things put on board the river-steamer Ipswich, bound for Ipswich, an inland town about thirty miles distant from Brisbane, and the place where he expected to meet the horses which were to convey him to Mr Cosgrove's station, Cambaranga.

CHAPTER III.

IPSWICH IN THE OLD DAYS—A "JACKAROO" ON HORSEBACK.

THE river-steamer Ipswich was not long in conveying our "new chum," like hundreds of others previously, and thousands subsequently, to his place of destination. The river-scenery appeared even more beautiful than on the preceding day, for on three parts of the days of the year in Queensland the sun shines brilliantly.

He found, on inquiry, that Mr Cosgrove's agent knew nothing about him or horses; so taking up his quarters at one of the hotels, he despatched a letter to Mr Cosgrove's manager, acquainting him with his arrival, and then proceeded to survey the town. This he accomplished in a very short time; but, nevertheless, much was occurring around of a novel and interesting character.

Numbers of bullock-waggons, each drawn by ten or twelve great, bony-looking, large-horned oxen, lined the streets, their drivers sunburnt, healthy-looking men, in home-made flannel shirts and moleskin trousers, and cabbage-tree hats, mostly engaged with others similarly attired in either unloading bales of wool or loading supplies at the various stores, the occupation being interrupted every now and then by what John soon learned was the great national pastime of Queensland—viz., having a drink all round.

Laden teams, groaning and creaking, slowly made their way into or out of the busy little town, among clouds of dust, with much cracking of whips and shouting of bullocks' names by the drivers, who walked beside their teams, carrying over their shoulders a long-handled whip with thong of raw salted hide, called in the colony "greenhide."

In many instances, when two or three teams travelled together, one or more were driven by blackboys —that is to say, aboriginal natives—the term being invariably employed by colonists towards the blacks in their service, no matter what age they may be. These were attired similarly to their white companions, in shirt and trousers—but the shirts were, as a rule, of a more gaudy pattern; and a bright-coloured handkerchief as often as not encircled their waists or was bound round their heads.

They seemed very proficient in the vocabulary necessary to the professed bullock-driver, and thorough masters of the formidable cowhide, and, on the whole, were happy, merry fellows, with dark shiny complexions, bright eyes, and strong white teeth. As a rule, they had beautiful curly hair, and some of the more civilised among them seemed to bestow great care upon their personal appearance. Horses of all kinds, and ridden by men, women, and boys, passed continually up and down the streets, or stood tied up at the doors of stores and private dwellings. Every one seemed to ride who had any business to do. Each house had its stock-yard, or enclosure of posts and rails, for the purpose of holding horses and cattle when driven in from the surrounding bush, where they pastured. Men kept arriving from the country or departing thither chiefly on horseback. To a practised eye it was an easy matter to determine the calling or profession of each from his appearance. The old shepherd generally came slowly along, mounted on some long-tailed, quiet mare, or good-looking but aged and

broken-down hack, sitting on a stained, patched, old saddle—a huge bundle of clothes, wrapped in a well-worn blue blanket, strapped in front of him; a dog-chain or two fastened on one side of his saddle, and a quart-pot and pint rattling together on the other. An old, worn, blue-serge shirt on his back, a pair of dirty white moleskin trousers covering his nether man, and a battered old felt hat on his head, completed his attire; while his pouch containing his knife, matches, and tobacco, together with his last agreement of service, a few old receipts for horses bought, and, in all probability, a considerable cheque—a sensible collie-dog or two generally bringing up the rear.

The splitter and fencer or the shearer presented a much smarter appearance. Strong, muscular, bearded, in his prime, clad neatly and comfortably, sometimes with a spare horse carrying his baggage, he came into town hearty and jolly, to leave it, alas! too often, with an emptier pocket, and a bloodshot eye and shaking hand.

The neat, smart-looking, well-mounted stockman passed quickly along, sitting his horse with an easy grace, the result of many a long overland journey or sharp mountain gallop. Now and again a squatter, mounted on a well-bred, active hack, moved by, a spare horse or two being driven by his attendant black-boy. The public-houses presented a very busy sight; and judging by the bars, it seemed that when men were not eating, sleeping, or working, they were drinking grog and boasting (or blowing, in colonial parlance) of some feat which they had performed, or of the particular merits of some horse, bullock, dog, or man. As a rule, the conversation was very horsey or bullocky. The bar parlours seemed to be quite as full as the tap-rooms; and squatters, merchants, and professional men transacted their business, or amused themselves, very much in the same manner as their inferiors.

No bargain could be completed without a "wet"

over it, and no friendship formed or enmity forgotten without recourse to the bottle. Many of the shepherds and other bushmen, indeed, considered it the correct thing to put their year's wages into the hands of the publican whose house they stayed at, with the request to inform them when the money was spent—until which time they themselves drank, and treated everybody else who would drink with them. Indeed they not unfrequently annoyed those whom they might chance to fall in with by insisting on standing treat—a refusal being very often answered by a show of anger and an indignant "Oh, you're too —— proud to drink with a poor man!" Quarrelling, singing, riding furiously, a night spent in the lock-up, a recovery of misery, perhaps a touch of *delirium tremens*, —in this way many of these men spent their short holiday in town, and the money they had laboured so hard for.

John soon got tired of these scenes, and took his way back to his inn. On the road he passed numerous parties of aboriginals—the men in tattered shirts and trousers, mostly without hats, their heads covered with a huge mass of tangled ringlets,—for the black fellow who lives in the bush bestows but small attention on his "cobra," as the head is usually called in the pigeon-English which they employ. The women sometimes wore merely a shirt; and a favourite article of apparel was the skirt of a white woman's dress, the band fastened over one shoulder and under the other arm, the opposite arm passing through the slit. Sometimes they used cloaks made of opossum-skin, and many carried children on their backs.

John afterwards learnt that it was compulsory for them to appear clothed to a certain extent in town, their own natural inclination being the other way. They seemed to loiter about without any particular object. Occasionally one of the men might be seen chopping wood or fetching water, and some of the *gins*, as the

women are called, employed in assisting at housework. Many begged, on the smallest opportunity, for *toombacco* (tobacco) or "white money;" others were seated or stretched lazily along the shady side of some building, incessantly singing a monotonous ditty, or enjoying a snooze. On the whole, they seemed a merry, happy, careless, tolerably well-fed, dirty, greasy set of black people, with a peculiar smoky, overpowering smell about them.

These were part of the Ipswich tribe, and knocked out a precarious living by hunting in the bush and begging in the town.

The enforced stay at Ipswich wearied our friend exceedingly; he found himself the only aimless person in the place. All day long there were arrivals and departures on horseback. Bullock-drays came and went; supplies were landed from the steamers, and wool was despatched.

Among others, John's shipmate Boyle made a start up-country, his departure giving rise to an episode of considerable interest. He had been staying in Brisbane for a day or two, and had there purchased a handsome, though somewhat shy, black mare to carry him to his destination. This animal he had caused to be caparisoned in front of his hotel with the paraphernalia which he had brought out with him from home, thinking that in a colony so remote all saddlery was difficult to procure. His steed looked brilliant, in all the shining glory of new furniture, a glistening new bit in her mouth, and a martingale half-a-dozen sizes too big round her neck; while a huge-sized valise, sufficient for a family, crossed the pommel of his saddle, and occupied almost the entire seat. A stiff, ill-made English stock-whip hung on one side, and an apparatus containing a multitudinous assortment of knives, forks, spoons, dishes, tumblers, &c., as supposed in England to be necessary for people who eat in the open air, hung on the other. Everything about

the whole bespoke "new chum," and accordingly a crowd of amused bush and town people gathered round to see the mount made and the start effected.

Presently the new arrival issued from the veranda, dressed, according to his own ideas, as much like a bushman as possible, in a thick coat and waistcoat, heavy enough for an English winter, and a pair of thick, baggy cord-breeches, with long, heavy-soled Napoleon boots, garnished with formidable long-necked spurs. A brand-new cabbage-tree hat protected his head; his waist was confined by a broad leathern belt, supporting on one side a revolver, and on the other a large butcher's knife.

It was a matter of no little difficulty for him to mount his steed, partly from his cumbrous attire and the huge "swag" which lay across the seat, as well as from the unpleasant way in which the newly panelled saddle kept slipping over the fat round back of his mare whenever his weight bore on the stirrup. In time, by dint of one man holding to the opposite stirrup, another keeping back the swag, a third holding the bridle, and a fourth pushing him behind, Mr Boyle gained a romantic and picturesque perch, much to his own satisfaction, amidst shouts of "Stick to her, squatter!" from the deeply interested spectators, whose amusement was, however, soon to be changed into consternation; for when they had followed the cavalier a short distance to an open space, it entered into his head to see how his mare stood fire in case he might be placed in some of the perils which he fancied beset his journey. Accordingly, he drew his trusty and much-valued "double action" out of its bright new pouch. It had been loaded with much attention that morning; and aiming at a stump, he fired. He had no time to witness the effect of his shot. With a bound his charger flew round, and getting amongst the small crowd of onlookers, she put down her head, and executed in a circle a series of remarkably active

buck-jumps. Her rider could not fall off. He sat there, trussed by the swag in front of him, desperation in his face, his long spurs jammed well into the sides of the mare, his hand mechanically holding the pistol, and with each succeeding jump involuntarily pulling the trigger, causing the bullets to fly in every direction. There was no more laughter from the spectators. With one impulse they threw themselves on the ground, preferring the chance of being trampled on by the horse to being subjected to the erratic fire of the equestrian acrobat. On the chambers being all discharged, the mare ceased bucking, and no one was more astonished than the rider to find himself still in his saddle. And he departed, much to the relief of those who had thus stood, or lain down to, powder for the first time.

CHAPTER IV.

A START UP-COUNTRY.

AN evening or two after Boyle's departure John was sitting in the veranda, when a nondescript-looking vehicle, drawn by two horses tandem-fashion, and containing a very stout woman and a stockman-looking man, drove up. John had the pleasure of meeting the stout woman at dinner, and she turned out to be the proprietress of a hotel in the neighbourhood of Mr Cosgrove's station. When she heard John was going there, but detained from want of horses, she kindly informed him that he might ride one of her two back, as she intended remaining some time in town, and was about sending back horses and man.

Our hero gladly accepted the offer; and next morning, after many preparations, in close imitation of his friend Boyle, he made ready to start. His guide was the ostler of the hotel, who, being from home, was consequently on the spree. He called on John to make haste, sprang on his own horse, and in a few minutes both were galloping out of the town. The ostler proceeded in the most correct bush style. Every now and then uttering a wild cry and dashing his spurs into his nag's sides, he would fly along at his topmost speed, only to pull up again at the nearest public-house, to the veranda of which his horse's bridle was hung until he had imbibed a nobbler or two. John's horse seemed rather astonished not to find his rider executing similar war-cries, but he nevertheless tore after his com-

panion with a desperate energy, which showed the interest he took in the proceeding, and pulled up at the doors of the bush inns with a suddenness which, but for the swag in front of him, would have sent poor John, who was rather aghast at this desperate mode of travelling, sprawling.

They reached their destination towards evening—a pretty, quiet little inn, the stout motherly landlady of which conducted our friend to a neat small parlour, and gave him a snug supper,—after which he betook himself to bed, feeling, after his twenty-five-mile ride, as if every bone in his body was broken.

Next day the travellers proceeded in a much more orderly manner; and about mid-day a man was descried coming towards them, leading a horse. This proved to be one of Mr Cosgrove's men with horses for the young traveller.

John enjoyed this journey through wild woods beyond measure; and when, after passing through many a dark ravine, and climbing the green slopes of the great ranges, they gazed on the distant shining peaks standing out against the blue sky, while all around rose silently tall straight-stemmed trees, whose leaves whispered away above them at an immense height, the first feeling of that love of the wild bush, its silent calm, and its eloquent beauty, began to dawn on him. His spirit welled up within him, and he felt, and rejoiced in, his strength—he revelled in the enjoyment of life. An unknown future lay before him, but he had no care as to what that future was; he lived in the present, and all was new and fascinating.

The startled kangaroo flying through the forest glade —the harsh-voiced, big-headed, laughing jackass—the bright-hued paroquet—the screeching cockatoo—and a hundred other forms of life,—amazed and delighted him.

How picturesque the encampment of bullock-drays looked on the roadside, when, the day's work being

completed, the bows and yokes were taken off the necks of the great oxen, and varied-toned sonorous bells fastened round them instead, and the jangling crowd was driven by a man on horseback up the creek to some well-known spot, where the pasturage was particularly good, the deep knell of the stock-whip reverberating through the forest every now and then! How pleasant to see the preparations for the evening meal, the huge fire of logs, the galvanised-tin bucket full of tea, the smoking dish of beef and potatoes, which, together with many other comforts and luxuries, proved that the Australian bullock-drivers have a partiality for good living, and indulge it! At last they arrived at the end of their day's journey, an inn similiar to the one they had spent the previous night at; and John's romantic imagination received a considerable check, owing to the exquisite pain which an alarming abrasion of his cuticle caused him. Indeed he almost feared that the end of his journey would find him minus the greater portion of his outer man.

He slept that night the sleep of the wearied "new chum," and with his companions was on the road next morning early enough to come upon a camp of fat cattle travelling down to market. The haze of the night had scarce lifted from the dank grass of the wide rolling downs. The smoke of the camp-fire rose lazily through the mist-laden atmosphere, at some distance from the road. A mounted horseman, enveloped in a large blanket from head to foot, emerged from the fog, and, as if out of the earth, there rose up slowly and deliberately bullock after bullock, to the number of forty or fifty, and took their way towards town, the horseman moving quietly after them in a zigzag manner. The mist clearing off soon after, disclosed a second horseman at the fire, apparently engaged in packing the food and cooking-utensils upon a spare horse, his own grazing beside him, the bridle between its legs.

The scene which now met their eyes was one of the greatest beauty; and John wondered at the unsympathetic manner with which his fellow-travellers listened to his raptured expressions of delight, as he viewed the vast extent of undulating, richly-grassed prairie, lovely valleys with timber-crowned ridges varying the beauty of the whole, while sharp wooded promontories here and there ran far out into the wide sea of plain, ranges of blue mountains forming the frame of this enchanting picture.

The lowing of the distant herd fell soothingly upon the morning air as, grazing slowly, the sated cattle made their way from the open country to the shady camps under the trees, beside the cool waters of the creek which flowed through this pleasant land.

As they proceeded they passed camp after camp of bullock-drays, the drivers and assistants all busy in yoking-up for the day. This cannot be effected without much running about, shouting, swearing, and use of the whip, which weapon the practised bullock-driver wields with the most severe effect, each lash leaving a long cut on the hide of the devoted beast, who cringes under it. As bullock-drivers are continually breaking-in young cattle, there is a constant freshness in this work, which is by no means devoid of danger, many of the young bullocks—and indeed some of the older ones—being of uncertain temper, and prone, when opportunity offers, to charge and gore any unhappy wight unable to get out of their way.

As the day wore on, they overtook bullock-drays lurching along heavily in the ruts of the road, the little keg of water at the tail-board swinging as if it would wrench out the staple it hung by, and the driver appealing occasionally to some bullock or other by name, following up his admonition by a sweeping cut of his "gully-raker," and a report like a musket-shot. The intelligence displayed by the leaders and polers was

very great; and they obeyed the word of the driver, coming to him or moving from him, with the utmost docility. The pace they travelled at barely exceeded two miles an hour; and the mite of a small boy who in some instances drove the spare bullocks behind, found relief from *ennui* in addressing imperious words of command to them, couched in the strongest language, with as big a voice as his small lungs could produce.

CHAPTER V.

ROADSIDE SCENES—NIGHT AT A STATION—ARRIVAL AT CAMBARANGA.

THE travellers proceeded along the road, their horses walking or jogging, which are the customary paces when journeying.

They encountered and overtook many teams, their drivers exchanging a morning salutation and a few words of greeting with John's two friends, who seemed to know, or know of, everybody they met. Occasionally a horseman or two, or a pedestrian carrying his worldly goods rolled up in his blanket and strapped on his back, a billy (that is, a round tin pitcher with a lid) in his hand, and with a dog or two at his heels, met and passed them, exchanging the usual "good morning."

These men all seemed to go without coats or waistcoats, or braces, a waist-belt confining the trousers at the girdle. Indeed, so much did this seem the fashion, that partly induced by it, and partly by the heat, John soon followed suit, and rolled his upper clothing in the swag in front of him.

Traces of favourite camping-places met their eyes at every water-course they came to. Each lagoon or water-hole had innumerable round spots of grey ashes, with a few black embers lying among them, all around it. Many of the surrounding trees were cut down for fuel; and great numbers of empty jam-pots, salmon, lobster, and sardine tins, broken brandy-bottles, per-

haps an old boot or two, and part of a rotten old saddle, lay scattered about. Soon they passed a head-station, as the homestead and main buildings of a station are invariably called. It belonged to a very rich squatter, whose name was a power in the country, and was beautifully situated. The houses were comfortably built and of handsome design. A large garden adjoined them; creepers covered the verandas and outbuildings, of which there were many; and several paddocks of great extent, encircled by substantial posts and rail fences, surrounded the whole. They shortly afterwards crossed a small running creek, and it being almost mid-day, a halt was called for the purpose of giving the horses a spell and having a "pot of tea."

Accordingly, the horses were unsaddled. They were then taken down to the water and had their backs washed, to prevent the sweat hardening under the saddle and causing sores; after which each had a pair of hobbles fastened round his fore-fetlocks, a proceeding which he quite seemed to expect; and they hobbled off in a series of short jerks, with their noses to the ground, seeking for the softest spot in the vicinity. This was no sooner discovered than they dropped on their knees, and thence on their sides, testifying their satisfaction by rolling over and over repeatedly. Then springing to their feet and shaking themselves free from dust and dirt, they set to work to crop the grass. John was so much interested in observing this that he forgot his own duties. However, his friend the ostler unstrapped the quarts and filled them with water, the other man having made a glorious fire in a few minutes. The quart-pots were now put on to boil, swags were opened and food produced. John, unused to the ways of the bush, and feeling, after the good breakfast, as if he never would want food again, had neglected to take anything with him for lunch, and now looked with consider-

able dismay at his own bulky but at present useless swag.

"Ah," said the ostler, "I know'd as how you new chums never thinks o' nothing, so I brought enuff for both of us."

"Look out there!" he continued; "quart-pot corroborree," springing up and removing with one hand from the fire one of the quart-pots, which was boiling madly, while with the other he dropped in about as much tea as he could hold between his fingers and thumb. Then stirring it with a straw, he set it aside to draw. The other quart-pot was served in a similar way; but John's, although in a hotter spot, showed no signs of boiling. In vain he applied more fuel, the fire seemed to have no effect.

"It's no use," said his friends; "them new quarts takes a month o' Sundays to bile. Ye see, ours has been used many a day, and they're battered and black, and takes kindly to it; but them new ones don't like it, somehow."

And so it was, for they had almost finished their meal before the new quart "corroborreed," as the stockman phrased it. It came in handy, however, with the after-dinner pipe which both the men indulged in.

Horses were now caught and saddled, swags were strapped on, and they travelled onwards in the same manner as in the morning. They had not gone very far when Spot—the little bull-terrier pup which John had brought with him from home, and which was growing rapidly into a very handsome young dog—made a rush at something in the grass, and shook it violently.

"What is it?" shouted John, greatly excited.

"Snake," returned both the men in a breath.

"Oh, my dog, he will be bitten!" cried poor John; and throwing himself off his horse he seized a bullock's shin-bone which happened to be lying handy. He struck the snake (a long, lithe, flat-headed black

one) such a blow on the head as to deprive it of power. Bully rushed in again before John could prevent him, and crushed its head between his jaws.

"Do you think he's hurt?" asked John, anxiously.

"Well, if he ain't, it won't be long before he will be," said the ostler; "but, Lord, you never knows when a beast gets bitten. Just the other day I was a-ridin' along, and I notices a snake—the same kind as that un—under my horse's feet, and I thought I felt her give a bit of a kick with her off hindfoot, but I wasn't sure like. Howsomever, she went along picking up a mouthful of grass now an' agin quite lively like, when all of a sudden she stopped and trembled, then she lay down, and she died in half an hour in mortial pain."

"Ay, sometimes they dies in five minutes," said the other. "I think it all depends on whether their blood is hot or not. If so be as they are warm, the pison tells very quick; and I think *that* 'ere dog is agoin' to croak."

John's distress was very great at seeing his faithful little companion move about uneasily, lie down, get up, whine, lick his hand, then look up in his face as if mutely asking help. Once or twice he returned to the dead snake and shook it, and John hoped they were mistaken in the symptoms. But it was not so: poor Bully shivered, drew up his limbs, became rigid, recovered, whined again, kept licking his master's hand, and at last died in great agony.

It was with a sore heart that John mounted his horse to continue his journey. The dog had proved a loving companion, and was growing very dear to him; besides which, he was very valuable on account of his pure breed, and was generally admired.

That evening they reached the hotel to which the ostler was bound; and after spending the night there, they bade him farewell next morning, the man refusing to take the gratuity which John offered him.

A similar day's travelling through forest-country brought them at night to a station called Cooranilla. They had struck off from the main highway early in the morning, and had passed over many miles without meeting a single traveller. Part of the distance lay over poor country, covered with ti-tree, box, and iron-bark saplings, with here and there heavy timber growing on sour-looking ridges. Lignum-vitæ and bastard-myall bushes were very common; while huge, dense scrubs, composed chiefly of bugalow-trees and undergrowth, lined the road in many places. In the neighbourhood of these scrubs the game was especially plentiful; and kangaroos, paddy-melons, wallabies, and kangaroo-rats crossed the road continually. Sometimes an iguana, disturbed from his siesta, would hurry quickly to a tree at some distance off, which he would ascend carefully on the opposite side to that on which his enemy appeared. Just before reaching the station the country improved.

In accordance with his mentor's advice, John rode up to the main building of the station, hung his horse's bridle to the fence, and walked to the house.

A lady came out to meet him; and John, mentioning his name and destination, requested hospitality for the night. He was most kindly received. The lady, who was the wife of the owner of the station, calling to a young blackboy to bring water for the horse's back, showed John the entrance to the paddock, into which he turned his horse. She then brought him inside, and asking if the man who accompanied him had gone down to the travellers' hut (a building especially destined for the accommodation of the labouring classes), she ushered him into a neat little bedroom. Soon afterwards the clatter of horses' hoofs announced the arrival of her husband—a big, bronzed man, with a fair beard and a bright laughing eye. He welcomed John in the most hearty manner; and before many minutes had elapsed, the young emigrant

found himself talking, laughing, and relating adventures to his new friends as if he had known them all his life.

Dinner over, the rest of the evening was spent on the veranda in pleasant conversation. His entertainers earnestly pressed their guest to rest the next day; but John, who was anxious to get to the end of his journey, declined. "Well," said the kindly squatter, "'Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest' is the rule of the bush, you know. Breakfast will be on the table at six to-morrow morning, and the horses in the yard ready for you. Good night."

Next morning, after breakfast, and bidding farewell to the kind owners of Cooranilla, the horsemen proceeded to complete their last day's travel. The roads were almost as deserted as on the preceding day. They sometimes, though rarely, passed a footman coming or going, or a tilted cart drawn by a couple of horses, and occupied by the driver's wife, children, and household goods. Towards the middle of the day, they came upon cheerful-looking iron-bark ridges; while on the right, green apple-tree flats bordered on a well-watered creek, along whose banks numbers of sleek, quiet, well-bred-looking cattle grazed. Occasionally they passed through a "mob" standing on the roadside, and John was greatly amused at seeing some of the young calves and steers advancing boldly to them with many airs of assumed anger, tearing up the ground with their fore-feet, and shaking their heads—only to scamper away, kicking their heels in the air, on a movement being made towards them. This, his companion informed him, was a part of Mr Fitzgerald's run—Un-gah run; and pointed out, at the same time, that the cattle had all, even to the smallest, the letters FGD burnt into the skin of the near-side rump. They were also all marked with a peculiar slit in the off ear,—it being customary, and indeed compulsory, as regarded protection of property,

for owners to brand and mark all their stock in a similar manner.

After some miles they came to barer-looking country. The grass did not seem so green, and was fed down much shorter, and innumerable little paths ran leading in the same directions. Towards evening they overtook a flock of sheep, greatly scattered, and slowly feeding towards a small hut which, with two large yards, occupied a rising ground about half a mile away.

The sheep seemed to have had plenty to eat during the day, for their sides were very much distended, and they moved slowly and steadily. The shepherd had left them to find their way home themselves, and had gathered a few sticks to make up his evening fire, when, hearing the horses' feet, the two black-and-tan collies which followed at his heels turned and barked, causing the sheep in their immediate neighbourhood to rush suddenly and look round, and the shepherd to set down his load and wait for them.

"Holloa, Tom!" he shouted to John's guide; "got back again? How are things looking down in Limestone?"[1]

Tom gave a short description of what was going on, and of the people he saw there, and of the appearance of the country generally—all of which was listened to with much interest by the shepherd. They now pushed on at a faster pace, and the horses themselves seemed anxious to get over the ground. It was dark when they arrived at Cambaranga, as Mr Cosgrove's station was called. The night hung heavily on the dark forests which shaded each side of the road, but above, the heaven was unclouded and bright with

[1] The name Ipswich bore before it received its present appellation. It is common for the older hands to retain the use of the name to which they were first accustomed. Many of the Queensland towns have these double names. For instance, Trowoomba was called the Swamp; Drayton, the Springs; Dalby, Myall creek; Roma the Bungill, &c., &c.

stars. At last they saw a twinkling light in the distance. As they approach nearer, a dog, hearing the tread of hoofs, barked sharply, causing numerous others to take up the chorus. The dogs then made a rush in concert (yelping all the time) to meet the new-comers; and satisfied on hearing the well-known voice of the stockman, they joyfully bring up the rear.

John and his companion now arrive at the little paling-fence which encloses the main buildings. Two or three men come out and shake him by the hand and ask a few questions. The stockman gives a short account of his proceedings; the unsaddled horses are turned out free into the bush to find their favourite haunts, and recruit after the journey; and John is brought through a veranda, thickly covered with creepers, inside the house.

CHAPTER VI.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES AND NEW WORK—A VISIT TO THE BLACKS' CAMP.

THE room John West now found himself in was small, but comparatively comfortable. Chinese matting covered the walls, which were of hardwood slabs let horizontally into grooved upright posts. A large fireplace, or open hearth, occupied the greater part of one side of the room. The mantelpiece was covered with odds and ends, such as pipes of all sizes and shapes, a spur or two, specimens of gold-bearing quartz, lumps of galena and copper ore, and other samples of minerals. A rough sofa, a few primitive-looking hardwood stools, and what is known in the colonies as a squatter's easy-chair, together with a table laid for dinner, completed the furniture of the apartment. It could be detected at a glance that no female held sway over the arrangements of the interior, everything betokening bachelor untidiness.

"Now then, sit down to dinner," said a grizzly, bearded stern-looking man, with a gruff authoritative voice, who was, as John guessed, Mr M'Duff, Mr Cosgrove's superintendent. "Let me give you some salt junk." John was hungry, and rather enjoyed the salt beef, which was not very old. Some boiled pumpkin and bread-and-butter completed the entertainment.

The two other men lit their pipes, M'Duff stretched himself on the sofa, and John took possession of a

squatter's chair. Conversation was carried on for about an hour or two, and John was shown to the room which was to be his, one of his new acquaintances telling him, "You'll have to do without sheets, old fellow, till your own come—that is, if you have any—or else you'll have to send down to town to buy some; the station doesn't provide unnecessary luxuries."

The young Jackaroo[1] woke early next morning, and went out to look around him. Early as it was, he found that Mr M'Duff and his two friends of the former evening were already abroad. M'Duff gave a grunt of satisfaction at seeing him up so early.

"Well, young man," he began, "so you don't like lying abed, eh?"

John modestly gave him to understand that it was very agreeable to him sometimes, but that this morning he felt more inclined to satisfy his curiosity.

"You won't be troubled with much of it here," said M'Duff, grimly. "Shearing is about to commence."

"You can spell to-day and look about you," he added, "and to-morrow Stone here" (pointing to the youngest and best-looking of the two men) "will put you up to it. He is going to take charge of the wash-pool. I shall be in the wool-shed all day. Come along and look at the store."

They all proceeded to the store—a large wooden building filled with an immense variety of goods, from meerschaum-pipes and bottles of eau-de-Cologne, to blankets and all sorts of slops. Large boxes stood in the inner store full of jams, pickles, confectionery, preserved apples, raisins, and almost everything one could mention. A door opened into a little side-room, fitted up as a meat-store, containing a salting-table and meat-blocks, while all around meat-hooks hung from the walls.

[1] The name by which young men who go to the Australian colonies to pick up colonial experience are designated.

Just at that moment a woman came to the store-door and asked for the storekeeper. "Now," said M'Duff, "watch Mr Stone, and you'll see what your work will be."

"I want my husband's rations for the week," said the woman.

Stone proceeded to weigh out 8 lb. of flour, 2 lb. of sugar, and ¼ lb. of tea, with a rapid, practised hand, and to empty each quantity into the respective bags which the woman had brought with her.

"Now," she said, "I want a pair of boots for myself."

Stone brought down the articles in question, and with many compliments on the shapely foot which was being shod, soon satisfied the demand.

"Now let me have some beef," she said.

"All right. Go round to the window of the beef-store," replied the seller. Here he plunged his arm up to the elbow in the brine of the meat-cask, which stood in a cool part of the store, and weighing out the required quantity, he entered the different articles against the woman in the day-book, and also in her own pass-book, and returned to the party.

"Now," said M'Duff, "you'll find the price of every article on a list in the desk: anything you want to know about, ask Stone or me. You will have to be up every morning before sunrise, attending to the customers, and be here every evening about five. During the day you can go with Mr Stone to the wash-pool, and learn to wash sheep. I give him over to you, Stone; make the best of him."

John took a fancy to Stone, who was a man of intelligence, of a quick decided character, and of gentlemanly upbringing, though considerably roughened by constant bush-life. He was one of that numerous class who have no capital to start with, and who spend almost all they earn in a generous, careless way. After breakfast, the other man, who was considerably

older than either M'Duff or Stone, and whose name was Graham, caught and saddled his horse.

M'Duff had his brought down by a blackboy, and having saddled it himself, he rode away with Graham to search for a flock of sheep which were reported as lost. Stone then took John round the buildings of the head-station.

These were all built of wood, forming a square, a court occupying the centre. In front was a large, low-verandaed cottage, thickly covered with roses and vines, one room of which was occupied by Mr M'Duff. The sides of the square were formed by the store, with its offices on the one side and the kitchen buildings on the other; while the fourth side was filled up by the building John had dined and slept in, and which was called "The Bachelors' Hall." A stable and cart-shed, and a dry store for the reception of flour, salt, and other commodities, lay on one side in a line with the bachelors' quarters; farther away was a hut for the use of the men; and a substantially-built stock-yard, or enclosure for cattle and horses, occupied a site still more remote.

A paddock-fence wound away across the creek which ran at the back of the station, and enclosed a piece of ground about a mile square, well grassed, and sheltered by many trees. An ample garden lay on the other side of a little creek which joined the main or Cambaranga creek just below the kitchen. Above the garden, on an eminence, was situated a substantially-built commodious wool-shed and wool-store, with several conveniently arranged yards for working sheep, and with a number of men's huts.

"There," said Stone, pointing to the big house, "nobody has lived in the *cawbawn humpy*—that is what the blacks call it—since Mr Cosgrove went away. That old cove M'Duff is a methodical old Scotchman, and I believe if you saw the inside of it you would find the tables and chairs in the

same places they occupied when Mr Cosgrove departed."

They looked into the dry store at the immense quantities of flour and salt which were piled up there, and then proceeded to the stock-yard. "There is the slaughtering-yard," said Stone, pointing out a small enclosure where two high posts supported a tumbler with long arms, having ropes hanging from them. "This is the gallows for hoisting up the slaughtered bullocks. You, as storekeeper, will be head-butcher."

Many heads and feet of defunct bullocks, in various stages of decay, lay about; and on the branches of the neighbouring trees, and in endless rows on the caps of the stock-yard, sat innumerable gorged kites and crows, waiting until their repletion should abate sufficiently to allow them to partake of another meal.

The two returned, crossed the creek, and entered the wool-shed. It was an immense building on piles; compartments with grated flooring, and little doors leading into and out of them, lined the sides; pens for sheep occupied the middle and one end. A lane went down on either side, between the compartments and the middle pen, floored with smooth planks for the shearers to work on. At the other end a long grated table, on which the fleeces were rolled up, crossed the room from side to side. Bins for holding different sorts of fleeces were ranged against the wall, and a large wool-press stood near the door.

"This building cost £2000," said Stone, "and it was cheap at that. In a few weeks' time you will see it full of shearers and sheep, and the interminable click-click of the shears will be going on for nearly three months."

"Mr Cosgrove must be a very rich man," said John, wonderingly.

"Oh yes," said the other; "I suppose he could sell this station for about £50,000. There are 60,000 sheep on it, and about 300 head of cattle, and lots of horses—

and the improvements, you know; besides which, he has had a splendid income from his wool for some years past, and I am told he does not spend much. But you know him better than I do. I only came here by chance about six months ago."

"Is this a large station?" inquired John.

"There are about eleven hundred square miles, good, bad, and indifferent on it, and it all belongs to Mr Cosgrove—at least he pays a nominal rent for a lease of it to the Government for a term of years. Should the Crown require the land at any time—as, for instance, for a gold-field, or to build townships on, or for reserves for any purpose—the present lessee would have to give it up, receiving as indemnification only the price of the improvements he has made,—that is to say, the buildings, stock-yards, fences, and other permanent works. Should the land be required for agricultural purposes, he has the right of pre-emption over a portion of it at the Government upset price. They are always changing and altering the land-laws in Brisbane. They never get one to their mind. There is a constant war between the small farmer and labouring classes—who desire to own small pieces of land—and the squatters. The little fellows want to be allowed to spread themselves all over the country, and pick out any piece of ground they may fancy, no matter how prejudicial to the squatter's interest; and they dab themselves and their families down in those spots to maintain a precarious existence by growing whatever will grow, breeding a few scrubbing horses and cattle, stealing the rich man's stock, and endeavouring generally to make themselves as unpleasant as possible, with a view to compelling the squatter, in self-defence, to give them a large price for their holdings; and when they have got that, they light, like a blow-fly, on some other choice central piece of ground, or around some water-hole which it is essential for the squatter to possess. So say the squatters.

The cockatoo settlers, or free selectors, on the other hand, fight desperately for the privilege; and having numbers on their side, and a certain amount of right, they make a good fight. This run has as yet escaped. It is, if anything, too far away yet; but in a few years, no doubt, selectors will be scattered over it and the neighbouring stations."

"And the sheep are spread over this immense territory? How do you manage with them?" still pursued the astonished new chum.

"We divide them into conveniently-sized flocks, from 1000 up to about 3000, but generally the number is about 1800. It depends greatly upon the class of sheep.[1] Strong sheep may go in greater flocks than the weaker ones, but the great object is to combine economy with the health of the animal. Huts and yards are built at selected spots all over the run. Two shepherds usually live together at a hut. Each flock occupies a yard. Food is sent out once a-week to these men. The overseer visits them once a-week, and counts their flocks to make sure that they have not lost any—although they generally know themselves, and come in to give notice when this is the case. They bring in their flocks once a-year to be washed and shorn; the rest of the time they spend in shepherding, and accumulating a cheque, which they will knock down at the first public-house they arrive at after leaving the station."

"And how far away from the head-station are their huts?" asked John.

"It depends upon the country. If the country at the far end of the run is well grassed, it will be occupied by a flock of sheep or two. Some of them are twenty-five miles away; others twenty, fifteen, seven, nine, one, two, five, and so on. I am going out this afternoon to count the sheep at about seven miles

[1] Of late years sheep are not often shepherded, but are enclosed in [illegible] and left to themselves.

away, and if you are not too tired you can come with me."

"I shall be very glad," returned John; "but tell me, have you any head-stations in the immediate neighbourhood?"

"None nearer than fifteen miles. It is a station of the name of Betyammo. A very nice old fellow, who has a very kind wife and two daughters, owns it, and they will be glad to see you over there. Further round this way, thirty miles away," continued Stone, shifting his hand over about a quarter of the horizon, "you have Barham Plains—a very swell station, owned by an old fellow who lives almost always down in Sydney, hanging about the clubs. He is a member of Parliament, and I don't know what all. He has a swell superintendent,—owner gives him £1000 a-year for doing nothing. The station is so good that the sheep almost manage themselves. The 'super' drives four-in-hand, wears kid gloves on the run, keeps race-horses, and leaves the work to a couple of overseers. Round this way is Ungahrun, a cattle station owned by a Mr Fitzgerald, and managed by his son, the smartest young fellow in this part of the district. He has about 8000 head of cattle. It is distant about twenty-five miles. Then here you have, twenty miles off, Mosquito Creek—a sheep-station with about 10,000 sheep, belonging to two young fellows who bought the place lately. Then, lastly, we come to Bindarobina, twenty-five miles distant—a large station, with about 50,000 sheep and 10,000 head of cattle, belonging to the United Australian Pastoral Co., a London firm. It is a fine run, but expensively managed; and of course the shareholders are far away, and understand nothing about station-work, so the manager does pretty well as he likes. He is a great friend of the manager at Barham Plains—the two run in couples; and here we are back to Betyammo."

"Now," said John to his friendly companion, "I

want to go and look at the blacks I see camped over there in the paddock. Do they belong to this place?"

"Yes," replied Stone, "they are part of the Cambaranga tribe; but I believe great numbers are expected to-morrow. In all probability we shall see them camped a few miles from here this afternoon; that is the road they are coming by."

They recrossed the creek into the paddock, and made their way to a little encampment of small conical huts, made of the bark of trees. A few sticks burnt slowly, and with much smoke, in front of two or three. Inside, dirty 'possum-skins and ragged shirts and trousers lay on the ground, making a bed for numbers of blear-eyed hairless dogs, whose skin showed pink, or blue, or mouse colour. Outside, a middle-aged, not uncomely-looking black "gin," sat roasting a bullock's bone on the embers, and picking off such parts as she conceived were cooked enough, then thrusting it amongst the ashes for a further period. An old man or two, with snow-white hair, completely naked, lay stretched in the sun, and lazily turned over when the new-comers approached them.

"What is your name?" asked John of one of them.

"Me Jacky,—old man," replied darky.

"Where is your country?"

"Heah country belongin' to me; this one—Cambaranga—my country."

"What for bail you look out kangaroo to-day, Jacky?" said Stone.

"Oh, me poor fellow" (sick), returned Jacky, addressing a few words in his own language to his sable brother, and going off into a fit of laughter, showing his strong white teeth; then producing a pipe from the middle of his shock of white curls, and inserting his finger into the bowl, he held it out to John, cleverly detecting his inexperience at a glance, and in a whining tone said, "Poor fellow Jacky! bail got

it toombacco—bail 'moke" (got not tobacco—nothing to smoke).

Stone threw him a small piece of Barrett's twist, apologetically remarking to John, "He's a dreadfully lazy old vagabond, but occasionally he comes in handy to shepherd an odd flock for a few days, when there is no one else about."

The old gin and the other old warrior, on seeing their compatriot successful in his appeal, clamorously begged a small donation of the blessed weed; but Stone, disregarding their prayers, walked off.

"What a peculiar smell there is about these creatures!" suddenly said John.

"Oh yes, every nigger has that distinguishing quality very strong, more especially when hot. Cattle dislike it exceedingly—so much so, that I have known a whole mob stampede merely from crossing the tracks made by niggers a few hours previously. Some years ago, before the blacks were allowed to come in about these stations, they revenged themselves on the white men who occupied their country by killing their cattle, as well as a man or two occasionally. They do so sometimes still, when they think themselves safe from observation, and the cattle never forget it. Even those who never saw blacks before get frightened or enraged at their appearance. It would seem as if they have some way of communicating their hatred and fear to one another."

"What makes the dogs so blear-eyed and hairless?" asked the new hand.

"Sleeping under 'possum cloaks and blankets. Blacks think as much or more of their dogs as they do of their children, and the great heat in the *gunyahs* (bark huts) causes an unnatural perspiration to break forth, which soon deprives them of hair and makes their skin wrinkle up as you saw. A black's dog soon loses the distinguishing characteristics of a white man's dog, and acquires others peculiar to its

mode of life; but they are useful to the blacks in hunting the game upon which they depend for a living, and they cherish them accordingly.

"Don't these black creatures wear clothes?" inquired young West.

"Well, they do occasionally, but only when compelled to, or when the fit takes them. The blackboys working about the station like to wear trousers when riding, to protect their legs; besides which, clothes make them more like white men, and some of them have a great idea of their dignity; but when they get to the camp in the evening they take off everything. You may bring them up with the greatest care," continued Stone, "educate them, and show them civilised life, but when they return to their old haunts, off go the clothes and they take to the bush. The wild nature seems exceedingly strong in them."

In the afternoon the two young men saddled horses and rode out to a sheep-station called the Seven-mile Hut. About three miles from the station they came upon some more blacks who were engaged in making a camp for the night. This they did by simply lighting a fire and disposing of their few effects around it: the men stuck their spears in the ground, each in the vicinity of his own fire. Nullah-nullahs,[1] paddy-melon sticks, boomerangs, tomahawks, and *heelimen* or shields, lay about in every direction. The men employed themselves in roasting wallabies, 'possums, kangaroos, and other game; the gins were engaged in bringing up water from the creek in their wooden *coolamen*. Piccaninnies of all ages played about: some chopped the bark off trees; others were climbing saplings, or chasing each other about the camp. All were perfectly nude and happy. As Stone and West proceeded further along the road they met small parties all making their way to the camp, hunting as they went. These were chiefly women and children, the men

[1] Native weapons.

having gone in a body together for the purpose of assisting one another to surround the game. These parties seemed to fill the forest on each side of the road, no party following the path another had gone in. Thus each had a similar chance of finding game as they moved forward. The regular sharp chop-chop of the tomahawks could be heard here and there where some of them had discovered a sugar-bag[1] or a 'possum on a tree.

There were piccaninnies of all sizes. All the very little children were round and fat, big-eyed, curly-haired, and pot-bellied. Some of the younger women and girls were passably good-looking, with bright eyes and white teeth; but their short-cropped hair, flat noses, and small limbs were much against them.

"Where are they all bound for?" asked John.

"Oh, there is a *corroborree* on the boards in the neighbourhood, and these blacks are making to it," returned Stone.

"A *corroborree!* what is that?"

"It is a meeting of the tribes to dance and sing; they are passionately fond of both. Some black fellow at a great distance, it may be, composes a new air, of only a couple of bars most likely, and sets some words to it. His tribe go into ecstasies over it. They send runners to the neighbouring tribes, inviting them to come over and hunt on their grounds, and listen to the new corroborree. Great numbers arrive; the corroborree is danced night after night with the utmost enthusiasm; the game gets scarce, and all the tribes move forward in a direction determined by them in council. These corroborrees travel for many hundreds of miles from the place where they originated. The original tribes fall off and return to their respective territories; but new ones take their place, and the corroborree is carried away to distant tribes speaking a

[1] A nest of honey.

He stood a few yards nearer to them than the rest, gazing with uplifted head. Then seemingly comprehending what they wanted, he snorted and dashed off furiously. There was a confused noise, a few neighs from mares and foals, a huge cloud of dust, a rapid trampling, and John found himself galloping close to a number of mares and foals, streaming in a long line after a cloud of dust in the distance. John now realised what Charley meant by saying he would never see the way they went; but pushing his horse to its best, he flew on, hoping to overtake his companions. The mares and foals broke behind him in various directions, but still he pushed on; now some broken-looking gullies with huge rocks rose in front, and dashing down them at the imminent risk of his neck, he found still worse before him. This was rather different to sailing over the open level country. Here he was stuck at these gullies, while no doubt his companions were straining every nerve in pursuit of the famous Yellowman. Scrambling sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, he came at last to a standstill, and recognised all his efforts as useless. He was clearly not destined to be the capturer of any of that wild lot.

Turning his horse's head, he followed, not without a good deal of trouble, the broken gully to its junction with the creek, coming upon the tracks of a mob of horses heading down it as he did so. Disgusted and ashamed of his failure, John pushed on with hopes of not getting in very much behind the others. As he passed through the thick country on the banks of the creek, following as much as possible the tracks of the horses, he came to a spot where the broken and bent saplings gave evidence of their furious speed; and on the ground he was shocked to see a man lying. Dismounting hastily, he found it to be the stockman, who had met with a disaster amongst the thick timber. Recognising John, he faintly whispered "Water."

John procured some in his
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the extreme end, knocked out the brains of the animal as he galloped past. Some are caught in traps made of gigantic hollow logs, with hanging doors fitted to them, after the common mouse-trap fashion; but most are destroyed by poison.

Each man on a sheep-station carries, or should carry, strychnine, in order to poison the carcass of any dead animal he may chance to find on his wanderings through the bush; also a pouch attached to his saddle, containing small pieces of meat already poisoned, each bait wrapped in paper. These dingoes break into a fold of sheep at night, and often bite and kill scores of them, generally endeavouring to tear out the liver. Their bite is poisonous in a great measure, and very difficult to heal. They are usually of a yellow-red colour, with a white-tipped bushy tail. Some few are black.

M'Duff soon left the little company to retire to his own room. He was a man of few words, his taciturnity being rather caused by long residence among the bush solitudes than from disposition. His whole thoughts were wrapped up in his sheep. He seldom took interest in anything except station-work; and as long as he had good lambings, and got rid of his old ewes and wethers at a high price, he cared little about the world. He had a keen eye for a bargain; and certainly Cosgrove pitched upon the right man to put in charge of his affairs when he selected M'Duff, for the old Scotchman laboured and slaved away from morning until night. He never spared himself or others when station-work had to be done. Old Graham, the overseer—a rough, hard-working bushman, though a confirmed drunkard when grog was to be procured—had the highest opinion of the ability of the "old man," as he called him.

"He has been pioneering on the frontier for the last twenty years," he said, "and there isn't his match in the country to judge sheep, or cattle either."

He must be pretty well off," said Stone. "The old fellow does not drink, and he never goes to town, so he can't spend any money. What does he do with it?"

"Well," said Graham, who had been on the station for many years, "it was about five years before Mr Cosgrove went home that the 'old man' came here, and he had a good bit of money then, for he once spoke to me about investing it; but it strikes me that he has purchased a share in this station, for you may depend Cosgrove would never go home and leave everything in his hands without having a guarantee of some sort for its proper management."

"Like enough," returned Stone. "That accounts why he has the credit of being such a 'nipper.'"

"Of course, any profit that accrues to the station he has a share in. By the way," continued Graham, "we got a regular 'sell' at the ten-mile sheep-station to-day."

"What was that?" inquired Stone.

"Well, you know how often passing travellers have robbed old Jones of his rations. The hut is close to the main road, and easily found by the sheep-tracks."

"Yes."

"Well, I happened to grow very hungry to-day about one o'clock, and being close to the 'ten-mile' I made for it, to have a search for old Jones's rations, and a feed if possible. When I got there I saw the old man's horse tied up to the door. He had come on a similar errand. Well, after searching some time in vain, I found, planted away among the sheets of bark of which the roof is composed, a stunning-looking pie —no crust, you know—soft bake. We sat down, and there was only a small corner of it left when we got up, and we put that back in the old plant. The old man liked it A 1, and, says he, 'We'll come back here to-night and count the sheep, to see whether he has picked up any or not of the lost ones, and will tell him

to order plums or currants, or something out of the store, to make up for what we've eaten.' So when we came to the hut at night old Jones was growling a hurricane. Before we could say anything he roars out—

"'Them —— dogs of travellers have been 'ere agin, but they didn't get none of my rations this time.'

"'What did they find?' asked I, looking at the boss, whose face grew as long as my arm suddenly.

"'Why,' says he, 'I've been collecting all the rags of meat and chewed gristles I couldn't swaller, ye know—my poor ole teeth ain't as good as they wonst was—and I fried the hull lot up wi' some punkins for the dogs, you see, but there ain't much left. D—— them, these —— wretches, they won't even give the dogs a chance! I'll putt pison in it next time.'"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the others. "How did the old man like that?"

"Oh, he never said a word, but counted the sheep, and came home as sulky as a bear. Every now and then, however, I could see him shake his head as if disgusted, and say 'Bah!'"

"Well," laughed Stone, "after that I'll go to bed. You must have the stomach of an emu to tell the story."

CHAPTER VII.

OLD JACKY IN A FIX—SHEARING AND WASHING.

NEXT morning John commenced his duties as store-keeper, and found that he had to be up early to get the people on the station served, and all the rations for the various sheep-stations which were to be taken out that day weighed and made up in bags before breakfast. M'Duff and Graham started away, taking with them a blackboy to follow up the tracks of the sheep when they found a difficulty in so doing themselves; and Stone went out with the stockman to get a bullock in for killing.

John had to lay poisoned baits on the roads near the station. Late in the afternoon, on returning, he heard the sound of a whip two or three times, and shortly afterwards a mob of about ten head of cattle came over the ridge towards the stock-yard. They seemed rather frightened at suddenly coming on the buildings, and made two or three attempts to turn and gallop off; but each time they were wheeled back by the two men who rode behind them, and whose horses seemed to take as lively an interest in yarding them as their riders felt.

As soon as the cattle entered the great stock-yard they were driven into a smaller enclosure, thence up a narrow lane of high fencing into the small square slaughtering-yard. John now came up to look at them. In appearance they were just the same as English cattle, but much wilder, and bore the station brand

and ear-mark. They stared and tossed their heads as John advanced on foot, but took little notice of a man on horseback. None of them had ever been handled in their lives except when they were branded and ear-marked, and none had ever seen the inside of a stall. An old red cow, with one horn cocked and the other turned down over her face, seemed to dislike being looked at very much. She was very hot, having run a good part of the way home, as her panting sides and protruding tongue betrayed. Her temper was also of a rather infirm character, for John had not been a couple of minutes at the rails before she charged up in his direction with a savage ferocity which quite frightened him.

However, his equanimity being restored on contemplating the strength of the yard, he waited for a little, observing her motions. Sometimes she would rush in amongst the others as if endeavouring to hide herself; then she would make her way round the yard as if seeking an opening for escape, when, seeing John, she would again rush at him with her head low, uttering an angry and baffled roar. Then she would back towards the rest, tearing up the dust with her feet, time about, and shaking her vicious black-horned old head.

Now the knives having been properly ground, Stone came up with some men, bringing a bucket full of water, an axe, a clean cloth, and the steel. The blacks, who are always exceedingly active on these occasions, were all ordered to keep away until the bullock was shot, and the rest of the cattle let go, their presence only serving to madden the uneasy animals. Jacky, the old black fellow, who had begged tobacco from John the previous day, and who was a privileged person, was alone permitted to accompany the butchers as a great favour. Accordingly, to be out of the way, Jacky took up a position in a neighbouring yard, leaning against a tree which grew in the centre of

it, knowing from former experience that it was not required on such occasions for cattle.

Stone now approached to shoot the beast chosen for beef, but the wildness of the old cow prevented him from obtaining a steady aim; so, calling upon the stockman to open the gate of the narrow lane through which the cattle had been allowed to enter, he drafted the old cow back. He was, after a few minutes' delay, about to fire, when a wild yell from Jacky caused all hands to look up and shout with laughter.

The cow had managed to make her way into Jacky's yard through a gate which had been left unfastened, and noticing the black fellow, who was unconsciously gazing at the beast which was before long to provide him with an unlimited gorge, she made a desperate rush. Jacky, hearing the noise, and feeling her warm breath on his naked skin about the same instant, gave utterance to the shriek which had startled every one, and making what looked to be Herculean strides up the tree, just saved his bacon.

The disappointed "milky mother of the herd," still thirsting for his blood, kept watch below, no one feeling inclined to alleviate Jacky's terror or spoil the fun. The bullock was now shot, and the other cattle let out into a neighbouring yard. A rope was put round the horns of the prostrate animal, and dragged by three or four white men and half-a-score of blacks, all the piccaninnies tailing on with many a jest. It was soon pulled under the gallows, to which, after being bled and skinned, the carcass was hoisted, and left for the night. The blacks received the paunch, head, and feet as their share. The hide was taken to the hide-house, spread out, and salted. Old Jacky was released from his lofty position, and the cattle were turned out into the bush.

Mr M'Duff and his overseer returned home that night in good spirits, the missing sheep having all been found.

In this manner the days passed for a week or two, when signs of the approach of the grand event of the year began to make themselves manifest.

Men singly, or in twos and threes, kept arriving, inquiring as to the terms of shearing and washing. The washers were, as a class, considerably below the shearers. They were composed chiefly of what is called in the bush "knock-about men"—that is, men who are willing to undertake any work, sometimes shepherding, sometimes making yards or droving. They are paid about the rate of five shillings per day, besides their food.

The shearers, on the other hand, were often small settlers from some little township, who came up at this time of the year to earn a cheque, so as to enable them to eke out the scanty subsistence their farms afforded—for most of them were but young settlers, and had a heavy expense in getting things in order. Some were what is termed, *par excellence*, bushmen—that is, men who split rails, get posts, shingles, take contracts for building houses, stock-yards, &c.,—men, in fact, who work among timber continually, sometimes felling and splitting, sometimes sawing—an intelligent, hard-working body of men, who number amongst them some of the very best specimens of Australian workmen. An odd shepherd or two—who shepherded at other times of the year, but were allowed as a favour to make their flocks over to some one else, while they earned rather more than their regular occupation could give them—and perhaps a stray stockman, were to be found among a crowd.

The washers came up in a body, and signed their agreement, "to wash one and all of the sheep on the establishment," without any fuss; but the shearers, being skilled workmen, hummed and hawed about their engagement as being more important. The question as to whether they would accept a certain amount per score and find their own rations, or a less

amount and be found by the station, had to be discussed. Then another serious consideration was as to whether the station should find a cook for them during shearing, or whether they would have to provide one for themselves. These matters, however, did not take very long in settling.

A couple of days before commencing, the agreement was signed. Shears had been served out; the cook had his arrangements complete for accommodating upwards of twenty men with seats at a rough table, under a rough shed covered with leaves. Each man had put himself up a bunk in the large hut specially devoted to shearers; their horses were all driven into some well-grassed quiet "pocket," from which it was unlikely they would stray; and everything was in readiness.

Meanwhile the wash-pool arrangements had been going on with great vigour. Stone and John, occasionally visited by old M'Duff, had got the permanent yards on the big water-hole put in order. Hurdles for gates had been carted down. Parallel poles, resting on forks driven into the bed of the water-hole, were run out on the surface of the stream, forming square soak-holes, a long narrow lane leading out to the dry land. A stage was built, from which the sheep could be allowed to slide easily into the water of the first soak-hole. A Californian pump, worked by horses, and ready to fill a huge tank—the water from which, issuing from two long slits in the bottom, was intended to gush over the sheep, and give them the final cleansing, after they had been sufficiently washed by hand—was erected, and in full working order, and every other arrangement completed.

A cloud of dust and the barking of a dog announce the arrival of the first flock to be washed. They are counted into the yard. The overseer compares notes with Stone, and the number is found to be correct,—none dropped on the road in. Next morning a certain

number are counted out and taken early to the wash-pool. The yards are arranged in a circular form, so that sheep may not get into corners, and remain without moving. They are then plunged from the stage into the water, and are passed one by one through the soak-hole under the poles dividing the soak-holes, and up the narrow lane. The washers, some of whom have taken up positions in the lane, standing up to their waists in water, roughly squeeze the wool as the sheep pass; while others, standing on the poles of the soak-holes, crutch them with a long-handled wooden crutch. Some blacks have also taken their places in the lane, and are in some instances an example to their white brethren in the matter of squeezing out the dirt.

After this process, called "soaking the sheep," has been gone through, they are allowed to stand packed closely together for the purpose of sweating the wool and softening the dirt, when they are once more passed through the water. This time, however, each sheep is thoroughly well washed by each man in succession, until it comes to the tank, where the animal is seized by two men, and turned over and over under the strong head of water issuing from it. It is then allowed to make its way on to the green feed, where, in company of its fellows, it is taken charge of by the shepherd. In about three days' time the sheep are dry, and an oily exudation called the "yolk," which was washed away by the water, has again risen, softening the fibre of the wool and rendering it more brilliant and heavy.

The sheep are then brought at night to the wool-shed yards; as many as possible are packed inside the building, and the rest in convenient yards outside, so that the shearers may not be kept waiting. The hurry which infects every one during the shearing season is one of its main characteristics. The owner is anxious to get the wool off as soon as possible, in order to

shorten the knocking about the sheep receive, and get them back to their quiet pasturages, as well also as to get rid of the expense and trouble connected with the shearers. He is further alarmed in case wet weather may come on and delay the proceeding. The shearers wish to get through with this shed in order that they may proceed elsewhere and get another. The shepherds long to get home to their solitary huts, where they are their own masters, and where their flocks are undisturbed. The storekeeper groans under an increase of work, and longs for its close. So the moment the dawn breaks, all hands are at work, and sheep are seized, denuded of their fleece, let go, and others are caught. This goes on until after sunset, with a short intermission of half an hour for breakfast and an hour for dinner. The noise in the shed is a continuous click-click of the shears, accompanying a running fire of rude jests and pithy yarns from the men, and occasional shouts of "tar" from some one who, in his haste, has clipped a portion from the skin of the poor animal along with its coat. Boys run about gathering up the fleeces as they come off, and carrying tar when desired.

The fleece, gathered carefully with both hands, is conveyed to a long table-screen, and, with a sudden jerk, is flung out at full length. The roller-up, with a rapidity which is the result of long practice, separates the skirtings—*i.e.*, the inferior portions of the wool—rolls up the rest carefully, and the sorter classes it under its description; a boy then takes it to its particular bin. The wool differs very much in quality, and many various qualities may be found in a flock of the same description.

As the bins fill, the wool-presser packs the press with each particular kind, and compresses it into a neat bale about 5 feet 6 inches long, by about 2 feet 9 inches wide, and the same deep. It is then branded with its owner's name, its description and number, and

the date, when it is rolled away and stored for transport to market.

The men, for the most part, wore flannel shirts with short sleeves, their trousers fastened loosely under the knee with a string, and confined round the waist by a handkerchief. Most of them went barefooted, and wore little caps made of calico, or had handkerchiefs tied round their heads; and many had leather straps buckled round their wrists to strengthen the muscles. They worked hard for their money, which some of them, unfortunately, spent almost as soon as earned.

So the routine of work went on for nearly three months. Sheep came and went daily. Sheep were washed and sheep were shorn, the process being occasionally varied by sheep getting lost. This, with a perversity apparently inherent in their nature, they managed to do generally on Saturdays, so that Sunday, instead of being a day of rest, was usually as hard a day as any other. The shearers' cook had a very bad time. He had many masters, each of whom had a peculiar taste, which imperatively required satisfying. There were so many faults found with the style of cooking (the true shearer being quite a *gourmet* in the matter of doughboys and duff), there were so many demands for food and drink at irregular hours, that, notwithstanding the good pay which this functionary gets (he receiving generally a certain sum from each man, besides a subsidy from the owner of the station), two or three tried the office, and either resigned or were dismissed. No one would take the job. The shearers were getting alarmed. They would have to cook their own food. This was a prospect none of them relished. It was time lost, a waste of material, bad prospect for puddings, and no servant to order or complain about. A negotiation was opened with the washers, some of whom, no doubt, tempted by the high wages, would be glad to undertake the office. The shearers were right. A washer—a dogged,

determined-looking man—accepted, and commenced operations. That night, on their return from the shed, each pannikin and knife was laid on the long bark table, the buckets with the tea placed handy, and a huge duff and pieces of boiled beef in tin dishes graced the board. As usual, no sooner had the men taken their places than arose cries of, "I say, cook! do you call this duff?" "This tea isn't sweet enough!" "Tea's too sweet!" "Cook!" "Doctor!" The doctor quietly made his appearance. Rolling up his sleeves, he marched up to the biggest and strongest of the bullies, and pointing with his strong stump of a forefinger at the pudding on the man's plate, he said, "Now then, mate, is that 'ere duff the right thing?" The battered prize-fighting look of his bullet-head and flattened nose was quite enough. "I ses it's fust-rate," was the reply. "All right," said the cook, walking slowly along the table, his eye glancing fiercely round to find a victim. "Any one of you gents as ain't satisfied can gimme a lesson outside, you know." It was sufficient. A stillness almost supernatural followed. The cook afterwards said he couldn't imagine how any one could disagree with such a quiet lot of men.

The eye now got quite accustomed to the flocks of sheep coming in continually: round, with full fleeces, and panting slowly in the heat, to return bare, leggy, roach-backed-looking objects, covered with shear-marks, and the raddled signs by which each man distinguished his own shearing, with here and there ominous-looking patches of tar covering a gaping wound,—racing gladly towards their accustomed feeding-grounds amongst clouds of dust.

John had his hands full. His morning work in the store over, he had to attend at the wash-pool, where he took his place amongst the other men in the water, and worked till evening, when he had some hours' heavy duty attending to customers in the store. Even

Sundays were seldom days of respite. Sheep lost on Saturday imperatively constrained every one on the head-station to look for them, or a small unshorn portion of sheep had to be shepherded apart, or a bullock had unexpectedly to be got in for killing, or something interfered with the repose so urgently required; and no one felt better pleased than he did to see the last lot of "monkeys," as the shearers usually denominated sheep, leave the head-station.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DESPERATE RIDE ON A STRANGE STEED—HORSE-BREAKING.

THE shearing was no sooner over than everything took quite a different complexion. Mr M'Duff started on an expedition to look at some new country away in the far north, which he thought it might be advisable to buy, and stock with his surplus sheep. Stone had also left temporarily, having business, he said, in Sydney. Only old Graham remained at Cambaranga, with John, and his time was chiefly occupied in visiting the different sheep-stations and counting the sheep.

This slack season on the station was usually devoted to mustering all the quiet horses on the run, branding up the foals, breaking in the young colts and fillies, and making attempts to get in the wilder mobs on the outskirts of the station. Two horse-breakers were engaged to assist the stockman, and John was nominally in charge of the proceedings. The horse-breakers were slight but clean-limbed active young fellows, having that peculiar look about them by which Australian-born sons of Europeans are so easily distinguished from people of any other country. Both were very quiet and self-possessed in manner, but an experienced eye could detect in a moment the tendency to "flashness" which seems inseparable from their occupation. They were well known in the district as "Jack the Native" and his mate Charley; and no sooner were the proceeds of one job dissipated than a new one was sure

to start up on some neighbouring run, notwithstanding various reports that got afloat taxing them with "planting" horses,[1] and with occasionally taking a few strange ones to a distance, and there surreptitiously disposing of them.

Two better riders could not be found; and the Native was always open to "ride anything with hair on it," as he expressed himself, "for a ten-pound note."

Indeed, not long before this, when engaged on the Ungahrun run, Mr Fitzgerald had brought some very wild scrub cattle into his yard, and amongst them was a savage old scrub bull who had for years baffled all attempts to run him in or destroy him. He had had many a bullet in the most vital places—so said the stockmen on the run; and although he might disappear for six months or so, he invariably turned up again as well and savage as ever. So knowing had he become, that if, in the excursions which he was in the habit of making from his home in the scrubby broken country, down among the quiet herds on the plains, any of the men endeavoured to drive him with a mob to the yards, that instant he stopped, then turning his head towards the nearest scrub, he trotted off with a surly defiant air, the huge hump at the back of his head giving him the appearance of a buffalo. How it happened that he came in at all was quite inexplicable: the other cattle gave the men much trouble, but the bull "went like any old milking cow," as Jack the Native, who was one of the party, afterwards said.

Of course all hands crowded to look at old "Razorback Jack," as he was called, after a particular mountain which he usually frequented. Old Razorback did not seem to realise what had happened just at first. The contemplative mood which had betrayed him did not pass off until some one attempted to cross the yard. Then the old outlaw stepped out with a low

[1] Hiding horses for the sake of the reward sure to be offered.

roar, and desperately rushed at the intruder, who bounded lightly on to the cap of the stock-yard, sitting on which he addressed, in the calmest manner, a variety of insulting and defamatory personal remarks to the infuriated savage, who, kneeling down, tore the ground with his horns, lashed his sides, and roared in impotent fury a few feet below him. A hat thrown into the yard from the opposite side had scarcely fallen, when Razorback Jack's vigilant ferocious small eyes, which were watching everything, made him aware of the fact. In an instant he was down on it, transfixed it with his horns, and tossed it a dozen times round the yard, leaving it occasionally for a minute to return again and again to repeat the scene. It was now that some one, remembering Jack the Native's favourite boast, asked him how he would like a mount on old Razorback. "Well," said the Native, "I'll ride him for a ten-pound note."

"I daresay you would," said the other. "Rope him, haul him up to a fence, leg-rope him, so that he can't stir. I'd do that myself."

"I'll tell you what I'm game to do," said the Native, quietly: "I'll bet you a £20 note that I ride him without saddle or bridle, loose in the yard."

"Done!" shouted the other. "Remember, if he slings you, you lose the bet."

"All right," returned Jack; "but if he falls, of course that doesn't count to me as a spill."

Young Fitzgerald, who was looking on amongst the others, now remarked that he thought it rather too dangerous a joke; but Jack was determined, and he was allowed to have his own way. First of all, opening the gate of the pound—a small enclosure with several gates leading into other yards—he managed to drive the cattle into it, and separate the bull from the rest. The bull now rushed round the sides of the strong high pound seeking savagely for some opening. As he came round to the gate leading into the yard in

which he had previously been, the Native dropped quickly on his back. The gate was pulled open by one of the men, and the strange pair tore through it. None of the bystanders knew how it was done. So quickly and quietly had it happened, that the first glance revealed the pair flying madly round the yard amid clouds of dust.

The roars of the terrified brute were perfectly appalling, but above them now and then rose the voice of the Native as he shouted to his steed. He was lying on the bull's back, holding a flank of the animal with each hand, his long legs pressing the reeking sides of the infuriated brute like a vice, with a foot under each of its shoulders.

Round they flew, now plunging wildly in the air, now rushing up against the yard, until Fitzgerald feared that both man and bull would be dashed to pieces. Running to the gate he threw it open, and out flew the ancient scrubber, instinctively making towards his own wild domain, bearing with him the strong-nerved rider, whose iron sinews bound him as firmly to his grim charger as did the cords Mazeppa to the untamed steed.

Several men jumped on horses, which still remained saddled and hung up to the fence, and pursued the fast disappearing pair. The bull's fierce rage had now almost expended itself, for when they came up with the chase, Jack was sitting up, using his spurs freely, and chatted gaily with his mates; but how to get him off was the question.

Old Razorback paid no attention to their efforts to make him turn towards the yard. Steadily, his head bent low, his chest heaving, his laboured breathing sounding like choking sobs, he pursued his plodding path; and Fitzgerald, who now came up, began to fear that he would again regain his wind and elude them yet. Shouting to Jack, he desired him to throw himself off, in order that he might shoot the brute, with

which intention he had brought with him a breech-loading carbine.

"No, no," cried the bull-tamer; "I should lose my bet! Shoot him; never mind me—I'll chance it!"

Luckily at this moment old Razorback made a rush at one of the other stockmen who had ventured too near him, stumbled, and rolled with his rider in the dust. A fallen log came in very handy for the Native now. He rolled himself nimbly under it, and soon afterwards his namesake's career was ended by a couple of Snider bullets behind the shoulder.

Such was the man who, with his mate, undertook the job of mustering and breaking in the Cambaranga horses. These men seemed to find a pleasure in mounting the worst horses on the run, and it appeared to give them no trouble to hold on. They led a much pleasanter life than the other men employed on the station did. It involved no hard work or dirt, while their character for pluck caused them to be treated with a certain degree of respect.

John was astonished to find how suddenly a wild untamed colt in their hands acquired a totally different nature; and the Native, who had taken rather a fancy to him, offered to teach him to break horses in, provided he would ride, or at least mount, any horses he might desire him to back. Our hero agreed, well pleased, and his spare time for a month or two was passed in the Native's company. The morning after the bargain, on his going up to the yard, he found the Native and his mate drafting out some horses from a mob they had got in the day before.

"Ah," said Long Jack, "you're just in time. Charley and I are going to start breaking this mob in, and I'll give you a lesson. Charley is going to take those two in hand, and I'll take the black colt here and the chestnut mare."

The horses in question were each in turn driven through various yards until they came to the "crush

lane." This is a lane wide enough to permit only a single bullock or horse at a time to make his way up it. It is used for branding full-grown cattle, and the fences are made of the strongest timber, and are very high. Generally at the end of it there is a bail for the purpose of spaying. Up this lane, therefore, the colt was urged, despite of his attempts to the contrary, until he came to the end. Two or three rails were then fastened behind him, to prevent his making his way backwards out of his close prison. The fences touched his sides. In front of him the end of the lane barred his progress.

Wildly the terrified animal reared and plunged in the confined space when he saw beside him, for the first time, a human being. The beautiful eye, glittering with fear, dilated, and every nerve trembled and shook, while every unexpected motion produced a plunge and kick. With rapid and practised hands Jack and Charley threw the surcingle round the now sweat-dripping body, hooked up the end of it under the belly by means of a bent wire, and had it buckled in a brace of shakes. Standing high on the fence, holding the long sweeping tail, tangled in a huge bush-knot, in one hand, Jack put the crupper round the butt and buckled it with the other, explaining to John that in putting the crupper on any horse not particularly quiet, it was the safest plan to hold the tail up until the completion of the operation. A strongly plaited greenhide-halter was now slipped over the head, after which the headstall with the large breaking-in bit followed. Side reins were attached to the headstall, and loosely buckled to the surcingle, which was once more tightened up. A gate which formed at this place one side of the crush fence, was thrown open, and the now tackled colt allowed to escape into an adjoining yard.

This it signalised by putting its head down to the ground, in close proximity to its fore-feet, and in

making, with humped back, a series of active vicious jumps or springs, varied occasionally by a lash-out of its hind-legs, winding up by galloping round the yard, and kicking at the halter which trailed alongside it.

"That's the way, my little boy," said the Native. "That fellow will turn out a nice horse, I'll bet. I like to see them have their fling when first they get into the yard—it shows they ain't sulky, you know. Now, you watch the chestnut mare. She's a sulky devil. She's too old, any way, to break in. She'll never be any good."

The chestnut, a handsome mare about sixteen hands high, now underwent the same process; but with the exception of a vicious kick or two when being crupped, she showed no sign of fright. Her head she held so low that it was almost impossible to put the bridle on. Indeed, so immovable was she when tackled, that the Native, climbing up the rails, coolly stood on her back and performed various circus antics.

"Now," he said, getting down, "let her out."

The gate was accordingly thrown open, when the mare walked out, and moved away to a corner of the yard, where she stood quietly, bearing all the weight of her rather coarse-looking head upon the bearing-reins.

"That's a bad lot," said Long Jack, decisively.

His mate went through a similar process with his two, which he drafted into separate yards.

The black colt was now driven into a small yard by himself, round which he galloped unceasingly.

"Now," said the horse-breaker, "just sit on the fence there and you'll see me make that colt come up to me when I call him, and follow me all round the yard before long."

John, who had heard of this, but had never seen it practised, did as he was bid.

With his usual calm, self-possessed manner, Jack let himself quietly through the gate and stood in the

middle of the yard, causing the young horse to fly round faster than ever. This the breaker permitted it to do until want of breath compelled it to move at a slower pace. Its hind-feet treading frequently upon the trailing halter, and consequently jerking the head back sharply as often as it did so, also contributed greatly to this result.

"Why don't you tie up the halter?" said young West.

"Well, I could make him come up just as well without it," said the Native; "but, you see," he explained, "it's a saving of time in many ways. First, it is handy to get hold of him by—for the halter is so long that I can reach it without coming close to his legs, and can thus always keep his head to me, which is the part I must first get at in order to let him smell me, and be sure that I won't hurt him; and secondly, it is good for him to tread upon it. It teaches him, by jerking his head, to give way to a pull on the bridle. It is the first step in teaching him to lead. He finds that by slackening his head he eases the pain he would otherwise suffer. Now I'll take up the end of the halter and make the colt come up."

So saying, he lifted the plaited hide-rope and pulled sharply on it, causing the colt, whose nose was now rather tender, to stop, on which, getting in front of him, he made him go round the opposite way. This he continued doing for about half an hour, by which time the colt had become so far accustomed to control as to turn and move in the other direction upon seeing his master's uplifted hand and hearing the commanding way.

Now the Native confined the horse's movements in either direction to a few paces, stopping him almost as soon as he had begun to move, touching him with the whip in an irritating manner, but without severity, whenever the animal presented any portion of the body but his head to him. The colt now learned

that upon facing his enemy all irritation and annoyance ceased, he was addressed in soothing terms, the jerking of the halter was discontinued, and also the motions of the whip; but that upon endeavouring to turn away, or gallop round the yard, a severe jerk of the nose, a cut of the whip, and an angry raising of the voice invariably followed. The consequence naturally was, that he preferred standing watching the being who exercised such power over him. But although this compliance was rewarded by a cessation of his trouble for a short time, he was not allowed to enjoy rest for a longer period than about a minute—merely enough to mark approval. The Native irritated him to move afresh, merely to stop him again, at the same time pulling gently but steadily on the halter, repeating the process over and over again until the perplexed animal made a step in his direction, upon which the voice again became soothing, all motion ceased, and the animal began to perceive that in the neighbourhood of the man was peace and rest. Again and again the same operation was gone through, until suddenly the colt trotted up and stood trembling within a foot of its now acknowledged master, who, gently extending his hand, allowed him to smell it all over.

The same thing was repeated frequently, each time the breaker succeeding in getting a little more into the confidence of the horse, which seemed unwilling to leave the proximity of the man. Several variations of the procedure were now executed. Retiring a little distance, the Native called on his steed to "come up here." The unaccustomed distance producing some disinclination to comply, a shout, accompanied by a rapid motion of the whip, again compelled obedience, when the same method of reward restored the dumb treaty which had been concluded, of petting for obedience, and punishment for disregard of orders. Little by little the Native succeeded in gently stroking the

animal over the head and neck on both sides, sometimes startling the creature slightly by touching a new part, but succeeding in restoring his faith by patiently commencing afresh, and repeating every movement anew, taking care to gain ground as he did so. Indeed such a glamour had he apparently cast over the colt, that, walk where he liked, to any part of the yard, the kindly-natured though high-spirited creature followed, and stood patiently waiting, champing the large breaking-bit in its tender gums, and flinging snow-white flakes of foam over its noble breast.

The chestnut mare was now taken in hand, but with a very different result. She proved, as Jack the Native had foretold, unusually sulky-tempered. She could scarcely be got to move round the yard unless stimulated to do so by a pretty free use of the whip; nor would she show any signs of giving in by the time the men generally went to dinner.

Late in the afternoon the men were again at work, and John could not help admiring the steady patience and gentleness by means of which the Native gradually acquired such an ascendancy over the colt as to be able to handle him all over on both sides, and lift his feet all round.

"There is nothing," he said, "like handling; you can't give them too much of it. All depends on your making a horse know he has nothing to fear from you. Now I could have tied this fellow's leg up, saddled and ridden him this morning, but ten to one he would have bucked all the time, and been bad to catch, hard to mount, and unsafe for all but tip-top riders ever after. Now if he is treated with steady consistent kindness and firmness, and does not get frightened, he will turn out a good quiet horse. He may perhaps buck a little at first, or after a long spell, but nothing to speak of. Everything depends on handling. I shall ride that fellow to-morrow evening. Of course, if it paid me to spend

longer time over him I could make him so quiet that he never would buck at all; but I can't afford to keep him on tackling longer than two days. Horses in England and other parts would buck just as ours do if they were treated in the same way; but there colts are handled from the time almost when they are foaled. I have heard young new chums from England, who sat on their horses like so many bags of flour, blowing how they used to ride the unbroken colts at home. I never see them getting on our unbroken colts—not to say but that some of them turn out pretty good riders after a bit. We'll go now and see how the mare is getting on."

But the mare maintained her sulky, vicious stubbornness, and a couple of hours were vainly spent in trying to make her give in. She allowed herself to be rubbed over with a long stick, kicking occasionally as it touched her rump, but obstinately keeping her head turned from her breaker. It was getting late, and the Native, waxing impatient, thought he would try what effect the whip would have on her.

So flicking first at one hind-leg, then at another, he succeeded, after some savage kicks, in getting her to face him. But his rewards were not acceptable. She turned because she escaped the whip; but her sulky nature would not allow her to give in altogether. Anxious to get her right before dark, and feeling sure that she would soon come up after facing him, Long Jack gave her another cut or two inside the knee. She came this time, but not as he expected. Throwing her ears back, she rushed fiercely at her tormentor, open-mouthed, and struck furiously at him with her fore-feet. Indeed, nothing but the whip-handle, which he held crosswise in front of him, could have prevented his being knocked down and badly hurt; as it was, she drove him backwards through the gate of the yard, which luckily chanced to be a little ajar. Jack instantly returned; but no sooner had he en-

tered than she once more charged savagely at him. This time he was prepared, and met her with a sharp blow on the nose, stepping, at the same time, quickly on one side. Darkness coming on, the horse-breaker resolved to let her go that night; so, driving her up the lane where he had tackled her in the morning, he took off the breaking-in harness and turned her into the paddock. Very differently did the colt behave. Coming up, he rubbed his head gently on his trainer's shoulder, allowed him to take off the crupper, surcingle, and head-gear, suffered it to be thrown over his back carelessly, and followed him to the slip panel of the paddock, trotting off rejoicingly to find his mates.

"Well," said the Native, "I've seen a good many horses, but I never saw such a determined sulky devil as that mare in my life. She never will be any good. I knew it as soon as I saw her. However, we'll try what we can do with her in the morning."

They now went to look at the horses Charley had charge of, and found they were both as quiet as the black colt.

"You see," said Jack to our hero, "these two are all right. I scarcely ever came across a horse that this style of breaking wouldn't suit, provided he hadn't been humbugged before; and the curious part is, that the higher-spirited the horse is, the sooner he gets to understand you. The wildest generally become the soonest tame."

CHAPTER IX.

HORSE-BREAKING—RUNNING IN THE YELLOW MOB.

NEXT morning the blackboy, whose business it was to collect and yard all the horses that happened to be in the paddock, reported that one of them was lying dead in a small water-hole. On going down to the spot with his tutor the horse-breaker, John found it to be the chestnut mare which had given so much trouble the day before. She was lying in a shallow pool of water not more than eighteen inches in depth, with her head completely immersed. They had her dragged out, and examined her carefully, but could discover no injury which would account for her decease. Jack the Native declared that she had drowned herself deliberately, and related several curious instances concerning sulky horses which had come under his own notice, some of which John West heard confirmed by other experienced bushmen. However, no one seemed to regret her loss, Old Graham, who had a detestation of unruly horses, remarking that "it was a good job; it would save some fellow's neck." A new two-year-old supplied her place in the yard, and soon succumbed to the treatment she had resisted unto death.

This morning the black colt, after having gone through his lesson of the previous day several times, was fastened to one of the rails of the yard by the halter. Finding himself fast, he endeavoured to break the rope by straining on it with all his force. In vain:

he only compressed his jaws with each struggle. The greenhide-halter was strong enough to hold a bull. He reared and fought with his feet in the air, the halter being judiciously slackened to allow him room, and again tightened on his coming down. Gradually he found that, by coming close to the fence, the rope relaxed and relieved his aching jaws, upon which he gave over struggling to free himself, and remained still.

"Now," said the Native, "after a lesson or two of that sort, you'll never break a bridle, my boy."

All horses, he explained to John, should be thus treated when broken in. They learn easily a lesson then which saves infinite annoyance afterwards. The black colt was now driven about the yard in reins in order to mouth him until he understood how to turn to the right or left when desired, after which, another quiet old horse having been procured and mounted by Long Jack, he was taught to lead alongside. This he picked up in the course of half an hour. The breaker then rode into the paddock, leading him, walked, trotted, galloped, took him round the buildings of the house, and back to the yard again. In the course of the evening the colt's breaking-in tackle was exchanged for a riding-saddle and bridle; he then received a short lesson in leading on foot, which his previous experience with the trailing halter had prepared him for, and all that now remained to do was the mounting. This was accomplished in the same cautious gentle manner which had distinguished his previous education. First the saddle received a few pats, then it was moved backwards and forwards; then a foot was quietly inserted in the stirrup, and weight put on it, the colt being made to stand still; then the right leg was slipped over, and the rider sat on the back which never before had felt a burden. Dismounting, the same proceeding was repeated again and again. John was now made to mount the other

horse, and riding side by side the pair moved round the yard. The colt broke into a jog once or twice, sawing a little at the bit and shaking his head, but one steady firm hand kept him to the walk, while the other caressed him soothingly, his rider addressing him in various terms of horsey endearment. This lesson over, he was again allowed his freedom in the paddock. Charley's horses were both pretty quiet also. One of them gave a few bucks, but went steadily afterwards.

Next day John found himself called upon to accompany the breaker when riding the young horses; and with the exception of a sudden kick or buck when startled, they behaved very quietly. The men seemed to have a habit of sticking tight to the saddle intuitively when the animal they bestrode gave the slightest indication of restiveness. The saddles they rode on were very well adapted for breaking-in purposes, and John did not recollect ever having seen any of the kind in England. They were made of what is called "bag leather," with the rough inside of the skin outwards. They were well cut back on the pommel to allow the withers of any horse plenty of room. The knee-pads were very large and strong, covering the front of the knee completely; and a pad behind the thigh fixed the leg as in a vice. The pommel was also furnished with strong iron dees driven firmly into the woodwork, for the purpose of holding the straps necessary for fixing on a swag. The Native explained that second or third rate riders very often made up a bundle of twigs, rolled up in a piece of cloth, which they bound across the saddle by these straps. This kid, as it is called, pressing firmly on the front of the legs, assists immensely in keeping a rider down in the saddle when a horse bucks heavily, but is at the same time dangerous. The easy grace with which the Native and his mate sat on their horses was a source of constant admiration to the young Englishman. The

inimitable elegance which constant practice had lent to their slender, well-knit figures characterised every motion, especially that of mounting.

John soon learned sufficient of the breaking-in business to enable him to practise it successfully; and stimulated by the Native's praises, he hardened his heart and mounted several of the young horses for the first time. Gradually gaining confidence, he tried his hand at sticking to some of the more notorious youngsters, not without receiving many tumbles in the soft sand of the creek, whither he prudently conducted such animals as were of a lively disposition.

And now an attempt was about to be made to run in a mob of horses whose favourite pastures were in a remote part of the run. This particular herd of wild horses had amongst its numbers many fine animals which had escaped from servitude, and for which a standing reward existed. They had adopted all the characteristics of their wild brethren, and were quite as wary and watchful, and equally hard to turn in the direction of the yards, when they set their faces towards their mountain fastnesses. It was ruled by a stallion of unusual size and beauty, of a peculiar golden yellow colour, with waving long black mane and tail. He was a thorough-bred horse, son of a horse imported at great expense from England, out of an imported mare of equal breeding, and when a colt of about eighteen months, had by great negligence been allowed to wander from Bindarobina, the station of the United Australian Pastoral Company. For several years his whereabouts remained undiscovered, until a solitary stockman, tracking some cattle into this unfrequented spot, dropped across the tracks of a herd of horses, round a small water-hole at which he had stopped to water his own nag. Following up the fresh tracks for about half a mile, the stockman came suddenly upon a mob of nearly thirty horses, feeding up a pleasant valley, covered with delicate young

burnt feed. A loud snort from one of the mares announced their discovery of him; and the yellow steed, galloping round his harem, drew them off to a little distance, and advanced with proudly arched neck and floating tail at a high-stepping trot, to examine the intruder. One by one the rest trotted up, and caracoled in a circle, shaking their heads, plunging and kicking playfully at each other. Most of the foals and young horses were of the same rich golden yellow as their sire, and the beauty of their appearance plainly betokened noble pedigree on the father's side at least. A movement on the part of the man sent the whole mob flying through the forest glades. Several years had passed since then, and many attempts had been unsuccessfully made to get in the yellow mob, as they were called, but in vain. Whether it was that those who first attempted it were inferior riders, or poorly mounted, or mismanaged matters, none had ever succeeded in capturing the fleet monarch of the woods. The frequent attempts to run in these animals had served to make them unusually alert, and the chief difficulty lay in keeping them together, it being their custom to split in every direction when pursued. Most men who had tried their luck with the yellow mob came home unsuccessful, with horses knocked up, or perhaps ruined for life; and those thought themselves fortunate who managed to cut out, and bring home, a few mares and foals,—unable to keep up with the better-winded and lighter-heeled steeds. The Native and Charley had heard many tales of these outlaws during their residence in the neighbourhood, but had never had an opportunity before of measuring themselves with the mob, and both ardently longed to attempt the difficult and arduous undertaking.

The day came, and mounted on the picked horses of the Cambaranga station, the Native and his mate, accompanied by the stockman and our friend John,

started to find, and if possible capture, the yellow mob. John, who was in high spirits, determined that at all events no one should have it to say that he was afraid to ride, and resented highly Charley's depreciatory remark that "he wouldn't see the way they went."

The little party followed a narrow track, which, winding through some scrubby thick country, led them over a small range into the watershed of the creek, on the head of which the horses were usually found. The creek was at this time of the year merely a succession of huge water-holes and beds of sand. The country on its banks for some miles was of an open, ridgy, lightly timbered description; then, as the party pushed further up, it took a different character,—the soil became poor—a mixture of pipeclay and sand; the trees grew tall and straight, while thick underwood and saplings here and there gave a gloomy look to the whole. Further on the creek grew more confined. Ridges came close into it of a stony, broken, difficult nature, and at last, after about four or five miles of this kind of travelling, the country opened out again. Sandy, apple-tree flats, and iron-bark ridges, lined the creek here on either side; while at no great distance ranges bounded the view.

All now became interested in inspecting the ground. Horses' tracks, though old, could be plainly seen everywhere. A mile or two was traversed cautiously, the stockman assuring the party that if "Yellowman got wind of them that night, they might say good-bye to their chance of getting a run out of him." Accordingly a convenient spot was chosen for a camp, the horses were hobbled and turned out, and matters discussed with the assistance of the pot and the pipe.

John thoroughly enjoyed this camping out. The red sun was sinking behind the dark mountain-range, throwing a warm glow over the western sky. Not a cloud was visible. The horses revelled in good sweet pasture. The fire was lit and pots boiled merrily,

while overhead the laughing-jackasses chorussed out in discordant union their strange greeting to the evening. Clouds of white cockatoos flew screeching one after another in the same direction, like flakes of snow upon the sky; gentle little squatter pigeons cooed lovingly in answer to their mates on all sides, or flew rapidly up to a branch of one of the old trees which overhung the pool at which they were accustomed to slake their thirst. Sometimes a kangaroo would come down with measured thud, thud, and drink, and then return without noticing the human beings; or seeing them, would swerve suddenly to one side, and disappear with flying leaps. Certainly it was the elysium of rest. The recumbent position gave thorough ease after the long ride, and the friendly pipe produced a soothing effect on minds free from care, which those only know who have experienced it. How little sufficed them!—a scanty supper of beef and bread, with a quart of tea; a thin half-blanket apiece under them, and their saddles for pillows. John would not have bartered his peace of mind to be a king.

Presently Charley commenced a yarn, which drew another from the stockman, followed in turn by the Native, after which the entire party dropped off to sleep.

John had not, as it appeared to him, slept more than a few minutes, when he was awakened by one of the others, who, calling to him to get his bridle, started off towards where the horses had been feeding. Hastily snatching it from the ground, he followed, and soon came upon Charley, who told him that a wild mob had come down to their horses, and they feared that their nags might be taken away by them. Now they overtook Jack and the stockman, who had succeeded in catching their animals, and stopping the others, which were hastily bridled. John had not got the sleep quite out of his eyes, but soon the noise of many hoofs awakened him completely.

In the clear starlit night he saw plainly a dark mass circling rapidly round them, while the tramp of the wild squadron sounded like thunder. Suddenly there was a pause, then came a loud fierce snort like a trumpet-blast, then another short interval of silence. Once more the angry defiance broke upon the quiet night, then a rush—a breaking of saplings, the galloping of many feet—becoming fainter and fainter until lost in the distance. Sleep was now out of the question. The Southern Cross sinking to rest betokened that the night had almost passed. Soon the bright morning-star ushered in the calm sweet dawn. A few birds began to whistle. The laughing-jackasses simultaneously unite once more in offering their grateful but unearthly hymn of praise. Far down the creek, on one of the river-oaks which grow in its bed, a swamp-pheasant utters its rapid coo-coo-coo-coo-coo-coo-cook. Once more the cockatoos fly screeching across the sky towards their feeding-ground beside a distant stream. A huge crow, with a knowledge of their whereabouts truly supernatural, flies up and alights heavily on a branch above their heads, with a loud hoarse caw of satisfaction, echoed a moment afterwards by his mate. And now the glorious southern sun arises above the horizon. The air resounds with the joyous melody of birds, among which is heard clearly the rich full note of the organ magpie.

A hasty breakfast is soon over, pipes are lighted, horses saddled, and the party proceed on their search. How exhilarating is the morning sweetness! a brilliant fresh beauty pervades everything,—the leaves, the flowers, the grass, glisten with dew. As they cross the creek the horses stand with their fetlocks in the clear limpid water and sip it luxuriously, now and then raising their heads to look about them with their mouths full, a little stream escaping from their lips where the bit parts them. Now they follow the tracks of their midnight visitors. Occasionally they

pass in close proximity to some old-man kangaroo, who, surrounded by his does, sits upright watching the small party as they go by, until, reassured by the gradually increasing distance, he again drops on all-fours, and slowly hops from one sweet patch of feeding-ground to another, interrupting his breakfast now and then to scratch himself with one of his short human-like arms, much after the manner of a monkey. Frequently they come to a bare patch of ground under a few shady trees, with horse-tracks more or less fresh, and heaps of dung.

"Horse-camp," whispers the stockman to John. "We may come on them any minute now."

John's heart flutters with the excitement caused by the stealthy approach, and the knowledge that the first glimpse will send them all away at a wild racing pace. The others take things more coolly. Now and then one gets down to examine a track which puzzles him. Now the tracks split and look as if going in all directions. At this moment Charley, who is leading, stops short, and holds his head in a listening attitude, lifting his hand as if enjoining caution.

All stop, and standing in their stirrups, crane their necks to discover the mob they are in search of,—but a patch of scrub lies before them. As they cautiously creep up to Charley, he whispers that he heard a foal whinnying not far in advance. It is fortunate that they are to leeward of the mob. They all alight and settle their saddle-cloths, tighten their girths and belts, pull the chin-straps of their cabbage-tree hats down, and mounting, move towards the scrub. For one moment John caught sight of a mob of horses, some black, a few bays, a grey or two, and a number of yellow or golden chestnut hue,—the most prominent figure, however, being a noble up-standing yellow horse, with a rich golden tint lighting up the otherwise rather ugly colour.

He stood a few yards nearer to them than the rest, gazing with uplifted head. Then seemingly comprehending what they wanted, he snorted and dashed off furiously. There was a confused noise, a few neighs from mares and foals, a huge cloud of dust, a rapid trampling, and John found himself galloping close to a number of mares and foals, streaming in a long line after a cloud of dust in the distance. John now realised what Charley meant by saying he would never see the way they went; but pushing his horse to its best, he flew on, hoping to overtake his companions. The mares and foals broke behind him in various directions, but still he pushed on; now some broken-looking gullies with huge rocks rose in front, and dashing down them at the imminent risk of his neck, he found still worse before him. This was rather different to sailing over the open level country. Here he was stuck at these gullies, while no doubt his companions were straining every nerve in pursuit of the famous Yellowman. Scrambling sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback, he came at last to a standstill, and recognised all his efforts as useless. He was clearly not destined to be the capturer of any of that wild lot.

Turning his horse's head, he followed, not without a good deal of trouble, the broken gully to its junction with the creek, coming upon the tracks of a mob of horses heading down it as he did so. Disgusted and ashamed of his failure, John pushed on with hopes of not getting in very much behind the others. As he passed through the thick country on the banks of the creek, following as much as possible the tracks of the horses, he came to a spot where the broken and bent saplings gave evidence of their furious speed; and on the ground he was shocked to see a man lying. Dismounting hastily, he found it to be the stockman, who had met with a disaster amongst the thick timber. Recognising John, he faintly whispered "Water."

John procured some in his quart-pot, which the poor fellow eagerly swallowed, and coming round a little, with difficulty gave him to understand that he had struck against a large bough, which had knocked him off his horse, and he thought had smashed in his chest. Getting some more water, and propping his head up comfortably, John left him, promising to bring the buggy for him; and pushing his horse along at a gallop, soon reached the range dividing the creek from that on which the station stood.

As he turned round a patch of scrub he fell in with about a dozen horses coming towards him, and by their knocked-up, draggled appearance, guessed them to be part of the mob his companions had followed. Something had occurred to prevent them being yarded, which gave him a chance to distinguish himself, and redeem his failure. Shouting at them, and cracking his whip, he found little difficulty in heading the jaded animals towards home. His own horse was comparatively fresh, and he had nearly brought them in sight of the yard, when Charley came up, overjoyed to find that West had turned up in the very nick of time. The horses were now securely yarded, and to John's intense delight and pride he found that the Native had run in the yellow stallion. Singling out from the mob, of which he was the leader, the powerful thorough-bred had stretched himself to his utmost, as he raced along, followed closely by the hawk-eyed active Native, on a steed whose Arab sire had bequeathed to him an iron-hearted stoutness and endurance which a Bedouin might have gloried in.

Alas, Yellowman! the soft, young burnt feed thy soul loved is now telling against thee. Still, with reeking flanks and sobbing breast, over gullies, creeks, and through scrub, the noble animal carried his wearied body, the pure blood sustaining the fearful pace, his wily pursuer edging him nearer and nearer home. A few miles more and a mob of quiet mares and foals

are fallen in with, and surrounded by them, the conquered wild steed entered the yard and became a prisoner. It was at this moment that Charley, whose horse had knocked up with him within a mile of the station, made his appearance.

Hastily catching the horse which the unlucky stockman had ridden, and which had galloped in with the others, he started back to try and overtake the horses he had been compelled to let go, when he met our hero bringing them in.

No sooner was the accident made known than the greatest sympathy prevailed among all the station hands. One started at once for the nearest doctor, some seventy miles away, while the others busied themselves in harnessing horses to the buggy, and in getting it made comfortable for the sufferer, and starting back to the place where he lay. They returned late at night, bringing the man with them. A large poultice of marsh-mallows had been prepared, which was applied at once, and afforded much relief. This simple remedy was used until the arrival of the doctor next morning, he having ridden hard all night; and under his skilful treatment the poor fellow progressed rapidly, and eventually recovered, although a deep indentation in his chest showed how severe the accident had been.

CHAPTER X.

A HARLEQUINADE—BETYAMMO AND THE GRAYS.

THE news of the capture of the yellow stallion and some of his mob soon got about the district, and induced a good many to visit Cambaranga from various motives. Some there were who owned horses in the mob, or who believed, from descriptions given of horses seen amongst the wild ones, that they did; and there were others who were ready to claim any horse for whom no owner could be found.

Among the former was young Mr Fitzgerald, from Ungahrun station, a tall, fine-looking young fellow, of whom John had heard Ruth speak as a kind friend of her childhood. A short, glossy, black beard and moustache added much to the manliness of his honest open face. Living chiefly in the bush, away from the gaieties and temptations of town, he had retained the simple open frankness of manner and cheery nature which had always made him popular in his neighbourhood. Always ready, as he was, to afford hospitality and do a poor man a good turn, the working classes spoke well of him; while his skill as a horseman, and his intimate knowledge of bushmanship, together with the influence he possessed as the son of a large proprietor, secured the goodwill and respect of all, both rich and poor, in his district.

Old Graham was not at home, so having hung his horse up to the railings of the fence, Fitzgerald walked up to the stock-yard, where he met our hero, to whom

he introduced himself, telling his business in a few words.

A number of men were gathered round the yards, in which were still the captured horses. The yellow horse stood by himself in a small high yard, surrounded by other divisions of fencing.

The dry white perspiration dimmed his golden sides; the want of food and water had tucked up his belly; his huge tail, draggled with sweat and dirt, and matted in great bush knots, swept the ground; his long mane hung in thick tangled masses on either side of his huge bull-like crest. Imprisoned and captive as he was, the wild eyes gleaming with unquenched fire from among the black locks which half hid his forehead, bespoke an indomitable savage spirit. Proudly, with uplifted crest and arched neck, he trotted around his small prison with grand high action, snorting loudly ever and anon.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Fitzgerald.

"Oh, I believe he belongs to the Company's station," returned John; "they have sent over for him."

"You have a treat before you there, Dick," remarked the young squatter to the Company's stockman, who was looking on. "How are you going to manage him?"

"That's just what I don't know," said the man, who, though a good enough hand among horses generally, seemed rather frightened. "He's a bit of a man-eater, this one," he grumbled, climbing into the yard, and, cautiously approaching its occupant, who wheeling round, and raising himself on his haunches, struck savagely two or three times at him. "I've been at him all day, and that's how he treats me now. He's a regular —— Benicia Boy," he continued rather ruefully; "but I'll put the tackling on him in the crush to-morrow, and see how he'll shape with that."

Fitzgerald's attention was now directed by one of

the men to a particular horse in the other yard, which he at once recognised.

"By Jove!" he said, "there's a ten-pound note reward out of my pocket. I've not seen that grey horse these two years. I made sure some one had stolen him." Going into the yard, he endeavoured to drive the grey into a corner by himself, and catch him. In vain; round and round flew the mob like wild deer, the grey as wild as any of them.

Getting a light, long, greenhide-rope, and asking two or three men to help him, the young man gathered up the slack in one hand, and holding the noose in the other, whirled it two or three times round his head, and sent it circling in the air after the excited horses, who kept flying round. Hovering for a portion of a second over the grey's head, it settled round his neck with wonderful precision, the rope was tightened, and, after a plunge or two, the horse, obeying his old education, made towards them, still straining slightly on the rope.

The rest of the mob were drafted into another yard. Fitzgerald sent for his bridle and saddle, and had his horse turned into the paddock. With a long stick he now rubbed the grey gently over the head and body, then, gradually approaching, he slipped on the bridle. The rope was taken off and laid on one side. Giving the bridle to one of the men to hold, he approached the horse carefully from the shoulder, and endeavoured (vainly for some time) to put on the saddle; but it was not until the animal's fore-leg was strapped up that this could be accomplished and firmly secured. The crupper now caused some delay owing to the plunging of the animal; but all was satisfactorily managed at length, the men all left the yard, and, seating themselves on the top-rail of the stock-yard fence, prepared to enjoy the coming scene with true bush zest. Fitzgerald, after fixing the reins to the saddle, undid the strap which held up the creature's

foot, and allowed him to run loose, in order that, if disposed to buck, he might do so before being mounted.

But Harlequin, as the grey was named, did not seem inclined to waste his energies on pigskin merely, although he moved about very stiffly, with slightly humped back, and his tail held closely to his body.

"You better mind that fellow, Mr Fitzgerald," said the Native; "he's sure to buck a docker."

"All right, Jack," said Fitzgerald; "he looks ugly. I'll give him a few turns round the yard before getting on."

Accordingly the horse was driven at a canter half-a-dozen times round the enclosure, occasionally testifying his disapproval of the unaccustomed harness by humping his back, or lashing out with his hind-legs.

"Way, Harlequin, way, old boy," said the young squatter, stopping him at last, and catching him. "We'll try now whether you or I can hold out longest."

Leading him into the centre of the yard, he gathered up the reins in his left hand, and raising his cabbage-tree, allowed the chin-strap to drop to its place.

Standing close to the horse's shoulder, and catching the stirrup-leather in his right hand, he was about to make a spring when a violent plunge from Harlequin prevented him.

This was repeated two or three times, until Fitzgerald, shortening the reins, and slipping them up the horse's neck until his hand reached the animal's head, seized and held the near-side ear along with them in a grasp of iron, declining all offers of assistance from the onlookers. This plan answered. Placing his toe in the stirrup, he was on Harlequin's back in an instant,—a proceeding which that noble creature instantly resented by making a furious plunge halfway across the yard, alighting with all four feet on the ground at the same time close to each other, his

head between his fore-legs, his tail well in, and his back bent like a boomerang. A series of similar movements followed with the rapidity of lightning, the vicious brute squealing all the time like a pig, and confining himself to a small corner of the yard.

Round and round he spun like a top to the right then with a sudden prop he lashed out and bucked round and round in the opposite direction. Now he flew partly across the yard, bucking from side to side, and leaning over so much in doing so that it appeared to John a miracle how he recovered his gravity. Well did he maintain the title to his very appropriate name, for seldom did horse buck harder than did the grey that day. Fitzgerald sat leaning well back, his legs rigid, his body above the hips swaying to the motions of his horse. After the first violent shock, which shifted him a little in his seat, he recovered his balance, and John could hear him mutter between his set teeth as he passed near him once,—"No, no, Mr Harlequin, we don't get on the like of you to come off."

But, alas! the best of riders sometimes come to grief. The next time he passed John, the latter noticed a strap flying loose about the cantle of the saddle, and heard the Native remark,—"He's slipped his crupper; he's bound to come off now." And so he did, but not ingloriously. Each succeeding buck shifted the saddle further and further on to the horse's withers, now that nothing held it back, still the young man kept as firmly to his seat as ever; at last a furious buck and rear sent the plucky rider to the ground, still clasping the saddle between his legs, and holding the reins of the bridle, which had also been dragged off, in his hand; and away flew the horse, smashing the saddle with a kick which was intended as a parting salute for his owner. Loud applause and much encouragement had been bestowed during this scene on the young man, who, now picking himself up, examined his tackling. Not a strap

was broken, not a buckle undone; the mischief had all been caused by the animal managing to slip his tail out of the crupper.

"This saddle is done for," he said; "who can lend me one?"

Four or five were instantly at his service.

"Now then, old man," he observed coolly, turning to the horse, who stood watching the proceedings from a corner of the yard, "we will try another dodge this time."

This dodge, which was put in execution upon the animal's being saddled the second time, consisted in tying the crupper to the horse's tail with a piece of twine.

Once more springing to his seat, the contest recommenced, Fitzgerald, whose temper was ruffled, freely using whip and spur. This fierce paroxysm lasted about as long as the former one; then gradually subsiding, the exhausted bleeding steed acknowledged his efforts as useless, dropped into an ordinary canter, and came to a standstill at his rider's bidding.

John gazed with admiration on the handsome, graceful horseman as he leant back on the saddle patting carelessly those hind-quarters to approach which had been so dangerous a few minutes before, and listening to the remarks of the spectators.

"Well," said one, "that fellow went to market like a bird."

"Yes," echoed another. "Bucked a blessed hurricane."

"Buck a town down," cried a third.

"Never see'd a horse strip himself naked quicker," muttered a fourth.

"Good job for you, you didn't catch that kick," congratulated Jack. "It was as close a thing as ever I saw."

"Well, a miss is as good as a mile," laughed the young man.

So saying, he unsaddled Harlequin, and turning him into the paddock, walked down to the house with John.

The pleasant open frankness which characterised young Fitzgerald won our friend's heart at once; and before long, the infection communicating itself, he found himself talking away as if he had known the other all his life. There was also an open simple manliness about John which was agreeable to the other, who begged that he would return with him to Ungahrun for a short visit. There being little to do at Cambaranga, and old Graham offering no objection, the young men started next morning, making a detour by Betyammo station, at which place Fitzgerald was desirous of calling.

Among other topics of conversation, the character of the Cosgrove family came briefly under discussion; and it was easy to perceive that Fitzgerald entertained no feelings of love towards the father and son, although he spoke very kindly of Ruth.

"She was a dear good little girl before she went to England," said Fitzgerald. "I found her once lying upon her mother's grave, crying as if her heart would break, and I thought I would never get her comforted and taken home. But her brother Ralf was a black sheep. Before he left this he had surpassed in mischief all the blackguard boys in the surrounding stations. He once tried to steal a black colt of ours which had never been branded, and which he had managed to drive into the Cambaranga stock-yard among a mob of wild horses. If he hasn't mended his manners since he went to England, I should say he will get into trouble some day."

John assured Fitzgerald that to his certain knowledge there were no symptoms of reformation visible in young Cosgrove, but warmly re-echoed the other's praises of Ruth.

After travelling for about fifteen miles through a

sandy, rather uninteresting, thickly-timbered country, they arrived about mid-day at Betyammo.

Thick timber and wattle-bushes hid the house from view until the travellers were quite close to it; and for a mile or two back, huge trees, denuded of their bark for roofing purposes, held up their gaunt bleached arms to heaven, as if appealing against the cruelty which had thus condemned them to decay in the full vigour of their strength.

Everywhere were scattered stumps of large trees, mostly sawn down by the cross-cut saw, and their trunks had been split up for building purposes, as the chips and splinters lying about betokened. The buildings were enclosed in a paddock, one side of which ran parallel with the road for some distance. They presented a ragged, patched, rather tumble-down, yet on the whole comfortable, appearance.

The house never had been good, and its constant patching and repairing had probably cost as much as would have built a new one; but the family loved it, and in spite of the fits of new house building which periodically attacked Mr Gray, the owner of the station, they continued to dwell in the familiar old bark "humpy," so full of happy memories. The roof was covered with sheets of bark, held down by large wooden riders pegged in the form of a square to one another. The veranda extended the whole length of the front; but the two ends were closed up, and formed charming, ragged-looking, but exceedingly comfortable little rooms, covered by gorgeous creepers, except where, through the open windows, one caught a glimpse in passing of snow-white mosquito-curtains, and walls papered with illustrations from some of the pictorial journals. The veranda looked out on a pretty little flower-garden, its bright beds telling of much tender care and attention. A row of large-leaved tropical-looking arrowroot plants surrounded the little enclosure, beyond which the eye took in a considerable

portion of the paddock. The greater part of the trees had been carefully felled and stumped; while those remaining, spared evidently with a view to shade and effect, imparted a noble park-like appearance to the view, rising as they did in tall clumps out of the thick short sward of couch-grass, green with the summer thunderstorms. Morning glories wound their graceful stems round the battered old posts of the veranda; and a huge vine spread its large leafy branches over the entire back of the house, tenderly covering from sight the nakedness and defects of the friend who sheltered it from the cold and rain, acquiring itself a double gracefulness in the gentle act. The buildings, nearly all bearing the same time-honoured look which a bark roof so readily bestows, stood, like those of most other stations, in the form of a quadrangle.

The centre of the court was occupied by a large tree, around which a handsome gigantic convolvulus twined itself in many a fold, its large, green, plate-like leaves almost concealing the knotted stem and lower branches, from which long sprays trailed downward, swaying slightly in the morning breeze.

In the shade of this old denizen of the woods sat a merry circle of young black girls in picturesque though rather scanty attire. They were amusing themselves after the fashion of their light-hearted race, by singing one of their never-ending *corroborrees*.

One or two had gathered a quantity of the golden everlasting flower, with which they were decorating the short, shiny curls of their playfellows, now and then interrupting the singers with some sally, which would provoke an uncontrollable burst of laughter from all, causing a great display of bright dark eyes and pearly teeth.

As the young men approached, three or four fine kangaroo-dogs, which had been lying asleep in the shade, started up, barking furiously.

Exclamations of greeting broke from the girls as

they recognised Fitzgerald, whom they had known since their infancy; and as the young men dismounted, old Mr Gray came out bareheaded with a hearty welcome, and a running fire of conversation, orders, and reproaches.

"Ah, here you are at last, Fitzgerald! Pretty time you've been about coming over, after all your promises! Kitty" (this to one of the girls), "you yabber Bobby come up, take 'im off saddle, and give 'im yarraman water. Merry micky now.[1] Mrs Gray was talking of you only this morning," he continued, "and the girls are dying to give you your revenge at croquet. You were beaten shamefully last time you played."

Fitzgerald had only time to introduce young West to the friendly squatter, when he was surrounded by Mrs Gray and her two daughters, who welcomed him with an unconstrained warmth which revealed a long and intimate acquaintance.

Not less sincere and scarcely less warm was John's welcome as a new neighbour, and chatting gaily, the whole party entered the house, and going out on the veranda disposed themselves in various squatters' lounges and easy-chairs, old Mr Gray taking possession of a string hammock which hung suspended between two rafters. An animated conversation was kept up by the party until, lunch being announced, they made their way to one of the buildings close to the house, which was used as a detached dining-room.

The meal was plain but good. To John, indeed, after his hard fare of salt-junk day after day, it almost seemed luxurious—and yet it owed all its nicety to a little feminine supervision of culinary affairs.

After dinner more conversation on the veranda was

[1] "Kitty, tell Bobby to come and water the horses and unsaddle them. Make haste now."

followed by an adjournment to a spot sacred to croquet, which game had penetrated the forest-depths thus far, and which exercised as great a fascination over the minds of the bush-maidens of that time as perhaps lawn-tennis does now.

The sisters differed considerably from one another, but both were charming, frank, natural girls. They spoke as they felt, honestly, and openly; and while carefully trained by their mother in the usages of society, their fine open air and self-reliant life had done away with all stiff conventionality without bestowing the fast air which those city young ladies who despise its precepts frequently acquire.

Phœbe, the eldest, was *petite* in figure, and a peculiar neatness and deftness characterised her form and actions. She was clever, and had read and understood more than many older women with better opportunities; still with all, there was an innocence and simplicity about her that was most attractive. She was so unselfish, so completely without egotism, that she never seemed to think about herself or her acquirements at all. A humble, guileless, bright, loving little girl she was, and dearly loved by her own people, and indeed by all who knew her. Bessie, who was two years younger, was a little taller, and rather rounder and fuller in figure. A merry, laughing, roguish girl, who found amusement in everything, but with an earnest, sympathetic, true soul beneath the surface. Perhaps better fitted to withstand a contrary fortune than her sister, her spirits seemed to rise above any difficulty, and conquer it by force of her strong, faithful, loving nature. Both were cheerful, happy girls, with fair hair and blue eyes, learned in the mysteries of housekeeping, fond of riding, loving a dance with all their hearts, and as much interested in the latest fashions as the rest of the female world in general.

They had known Fitzgerald for many years, and

were never better pleased than when he managed to ride over for a few days. His appearance was always a signal for some unusual little dissipation, and many a scolding did he undergo from light-hearted Bessie when he delayed his coming.

"Come along, Willy," she called now, addressing him, as she nearly always did, by his Christian name. "I never knew any one so tiresome. You declare you must go home to that horrid mustering to-morrow, and you are wasting the whole of the sunshine; we have only two hours until sundown. Come along, Phœbe, do; Mr West, do hurry them up."

Bessie's energetic commands soon brought the party together, and declaring that Fitzgerald played wretchedly the last time he was her partner, she announced her intention of joining forces with John. Soon the party were engaged in the now disregarded and despised game. Bessie was the life and soul of it, and in spite of all Fitzgerald's efforts, she croqueted her ball through the hoops in a masterly manner, time after time, returning to send his one way, and her sister's the other, while assisting John, who, to tell the truth, was rather a muff with the mallet. Game after game fell to her and her partner; and at last, satiated with victory, she proposed returning to the house.

The utter want of female society had never made itself so apparent to John as now when enjoying it, and he felt quite disgusted with the desolate dreariness of the life which he had lately thought so fascinating. As they approached the house, several black fellows came up expressing delight in their usual demonstrative way at seeing their old acquaintance Fitzgerald, and inquiring as to the whereabouts of friends whose nomadic habits might have led them into his neighbourhood. The girls went in to assist in preparing tea, while Mr and Mrs Gray joined the young men in the garden. Soon Bessie's merry voice

was heard summoning the party in, and the evening meal was disposed of amidst much cheerful talk, and pleasant sallies of fun. A smoke on the veranda followed; after which Phœbe, seating herself at the piano, struck up one of Strauss's glorious waltzes, marking the time with much precision; and Bessie, calling upon John to assist her, cleared the broad floor of the veranda of the chairs and lounges which filled it, and ordered Fitzgerald to come and dance. He pretended lameness. "Can't, Bessie. Bad spill; hurt my knee."

"Oh, what a story!" and seizing his hand, she insisted on his making an attempt. Round and round they floated until Fitzgerald sank exhausted.

"Well, I never did see any one tire so soon," she cried. "I know you are only lazy."

John now begged for a turn, and acquitted himself to the satisfaction of the vivacious girl, who unhesitatingly declared that he was much better fun than her old friend—and "waltzes much better, too," she added, poutingly. She then took her place at the instrument, relieving her sister, who was solicited for a dance by Fitzgerald; and John fancied that her quiet manner had a slight touch of shyness in it, and that her colour slightly rose as she smilingly assented.

After some time, Bessie, declaring she was quite weary, ceased her dance music, and striking a few chords, sang a sweet old ballad, and the whole party entered the little drawing-room, which was really surprisingly pretty for such an out-of-the-way habitation. The slab walls were lined with calico neatly papered. A few good engravings, and a couple of old oil-paintings, representing Mr Gray's father and mother, were hung round, with some local sketches in water-colours, executed by Mrs Gray, who had much taste that way. Magazines and novels lay on the little table, on which stood a handsome kerosine lamp. A book-case, con-

taining a capital selection of standard volumes and works of reference, occupied a corner opposite to the piano; while a sofa-lounge and a few chairs completed the furniture. Tanned native dog skins served as floor-rugs; and tanned and coloured sheepskins looked very handsome on the backs of the easy-chairs.

Fitzgerald, who had a good baritone voice, joined the ladies at the piano, and John and Mr Gray conversed.

About ten o'clock the ladies retired, and the gentlemen withdrew to that apartment in the house specially devoted to bachelors. Brandy was produced, pipes lighted, and conversation returned to the grand staple Australian subject—"stock."

Mr Gray was a pleasant, frank, country-gentleman-looking squatter, with a kind word for everybody, and a keen eye for the merits or demerits of sheep, cattle, or horses. In early life he had served in the army, but seeing no prospect of marrying the girl he was attached to while remaining in her Majesty's service, he sold his commission, and marrying, sailed for Australia, where, after some years of hardship and ill-luck, he bought Betyammo, upon which he had lived ever since, well to do, if not rich. He was fond of retailing stories of his adventures in early life; and this evening, on John's remarking the gratification he received from the delightful hospitality exercised in the bush, he said: "Well, yes, it is one of the pleasantest features, I think, in a squatter's life, being in a position to afford a welcome to those in want of it; and indeed the favour very often is conferred by the visitor. From him we derive information as to the doings of our neighbours, and much general news which could reach us through no other channel."

"But do you not meet with very strange characters at times?" questioned John.

"Occasionally," answered Mr Gray; "but they invariably behave themselves with propriety. Should

they not do so, they would at once be requested to remove themselves to the men's huts."

"When I was much younger," he continued, "I was travelling in the New England district, in New South Wales. I spent a night at a bush inn, and there fell in with a tall, soldierly-looking Irishman. He had served as a soldier of fortune in more than one Continental army, and his conversation was exceedingly amusing. A sort of devil-may-care recklessness seemed to sit on him with a jaunty air, and one felt rather inclined to like the fellow. Our roads lay the same way, and we jogged along together for a couple of days, when we arrived at a station owned by an old bachelor. He received us very hospitably, and sitting in the evening over our pipes and brandy-and-water, just as we are now doing, the Irishman happened to make some remark about Spain.

"'Have you ever been there?' interrogated our host.

"'Oh yes,' returned the other; 'I served a considerable time in the Carlist army during the war.'

"'Indeed!' replied the old man, with much interest. 'I had a nephew,' he said, speaking slowly, 'a very dear nephew in that army. I wonder did you ever meet him? I have not heard of him for years.'

"'What was his name?' inquired the ex-Carlist officer.

"'His name was Nugent,' responded the squatter.

"'What! Francis de Burgh Nugent?'

"'The same.'

"'God bless me!' ejaculated the soldier, in a tone of surprised and rather curious interest; adding, '*Why, I shot that fellow ten years ago!*'"

"What a brute he must have been!" broke from both John and Fitzgerald.

"How did the old man take the information?" queried the latter.

"He got up," answered Mr Gray, "and without saying a word left the room."

"And the Irishman?"

"Oh, he wondered what was the matter with the old fellow, thought him very strange in his manner to his guests, and could not be brought to see that he had outraged propriety in any way by his indecent and cruel confession. We left next morning at daylight; I for one had no wish to meet our host again; and soon after I lost sight of the easy-minded mercenary. Now I'll show you to your rooms; breakfast will be ready to-morrow at eight, so you need not turn out early. Good night."

"Good night," "good night," returned his guests, retiring to their room.

CHAPTER XI.

EARLY MORNING AT THE GRAYS'—A RIDE TO UNGAHRUN —THE CATTLE-BUYER.

NOTWITHSTANDING that no duty called them forth, both the young men were up by daybreak. Early habits are so general in the bush that breakfast is usually over by seven, and all hands at work. They strolled up to the horse-yard, into which all the horses contained in the paddock had been driven by a blackboy. A yard full of horses or cattle is irresistible to a bushman: if he has the time to spare, he cannot pass until he has examined the animals, deciphered their brands and criticised their merits, and in all probability stowed away in his mind the images of some of them so accurately as to be able to recognise them after months and even years have elapsed. After an hour spent in this manner they returned to the house, where they found the young ladies busy in their morning duties.

Bessie had first come out with a plateful of food for her fowls, and as she raised her voice greeting her friends, a handsome tame "native companion," which had been stalking about picking up insects, drew near. Opening his large slate-coloured wings, and dancing grotesquely, the interesting bird approached his young mistress, bowing gracefully from side to side as he hopped lightly along; then running up, he laid his heron-like head lovingly against her breast.

"What a nice bird!" said John, who had no idea they made such capital pets.

"Yes; isn't he a dear?" returned Bessie. "Davy, our blackboy, knocked him down with a stick when little, and brought him home to me, and now he will not go away although he has his perfect freedom."

"I don't wonder at it, Bessie," said Fitzgerald; "slavery to such a charming mistress——"

"Now keep your compliments for a native companion of your own, Mr Fitzgerald," said Bessie laughing; "you will be taking one some day, you know, unless you marry an English wife. Come and look at my Joey, Mr West; and oh, Willy, we have got the most darling little humming-birds you ever saw! Phœbe has them in a cage, and she doesn't know what they live on, and she wants you to tell her."

"All right," returned Fitzgerald, entering the house.

The lively girl now opened the door of a small room, and a young kangaroo came hopping out. His pretty head, with its longish ears, and full, soft, lustrous eyes, looked something like a fawn's, as he sat up and ate bread from the gentle hand of the Australian girl. "There, Joey. Now look, Mr West, he follows me everywhere. I shut him up at night because I am afraid of some of the dogs chasing or killing him. Go away, Smoker, now! go away, Spring!" she cried, as two tall, rich, tawny-coloured kangaroo-dogs with black muzzles jumped up and raced round the terrified Joey, who hopped close to his mistress's skirt for protection. "When he grows a little bigger he can hold his own with the dogs," she said; "for they often seem afraid of touching a tame kangaroo, although they kill great old-men every day."

The native companion and the fowls, which had now flocked up, were fed, and Bessie and John went in and joined Fitzgerald and Phœbe on the veranda. They were standing close together, near a cage which hung half hidden among the foliage of a beautiful creeper. The rising sun was yet low in the heavens, and shone full into the veranda, causing the dewdrops

on the short grass to sparkle like innumerable diamonds. A beautiful little blue mountain-parrot flew from spray to spray, alighting ever and anon on the head or shoulders of its mistress, uttering, in a whistling tone, "Pretty boy, pretty boy," and John thought he had seldom seen a lovelier picture. At this moment one of the little humming-birds fluttered out of its cage to the ground; and instantly, before any attempt at a rescue could be made, it was seized and gobbled up by a great red cock that happened to be prowling about in search of what might turn up.

"Oh the horrid creature! he has eaten alive my little darling humming-bird!" exclaimed Phœbe, ready to cry.

An attempt now made by John and Fitzgerald to catch the marauder and make him disgorge his prey, served only to produce a wild cackle and desperate exertions to escape on the cock's part, which it eventually did by taking to its wings.

Phœbe was inconsolable for a time; and Bessie, though grieving over the loss of her sister's pet, could not help sometimes seeing the comic side of the accident, and laughing at the instantaneous and unlooked-for manner of its disappearance. Mr Gray and his kind wife now came, and the party adjourned to breakfast; after which meal, horses having been brought to the door and saddled, the two young ladies and their father accompanied the young men a portion of their journey, bidding them at last good-bye, with many hospitable invitations for an early repetition of their visit.

"What a nice family!" said John to his friend. "I had no idea that such lady-like accomplished women were to be met with in the bush."

"I believe you," returned his companion; "English people are so conceited. They seem to fancy civilisation cannot exist much beyond London. I suppose you fancied we were a community of convicts?"

"Well, the truth is, I had no very distinct notions on the subject. I always thought that the term 'native' was applied to the aboriginals, and now I find that it really designates the native-born white population."

"It is applied to both. I am a native, and am proud of it. I would not change, even if I could, to be an Englishman. It sometimes surprises me to meet with Englishmen, educated men of the world, who display an amount of ignorance about the extent, resources, and geography of the most important of British colonies, that one of our little schoolboys would be ashamed of."

"Well," confessed John, "I must frankly say that I knew nothing of the true state of affairs. I believed three parts of the people were convicts and bushrangers, and that the rest reared stock in some barbarous way, and picked up gold in the rivers or on the surface of the ground."

"Most of your countrymen have the same opinion when they come out," replied Fitzgerald, who seemed rather sore on this subject. "The fact is that, since the gold-fields were discovered, the convict element has been lost sight of and almost flooded out by the immense influx of population. You do come across it in various ways, but it is now a considerable time since the Eastern colonies refused to allow transportation of criminals to their shores, since which time most of the 'old hands,' as they are called, have died out; and although the disgrace clings in a certain measure to their descendants, yet they are comparatively so few in number to the bulk of the population, that they are quite lost sight of; and besides, some of the convicted felons were men transported for political offences, and other causes, which carried no degrading taint with them. Others, sent out for very trifling misdemeanours, were probably much honester than many who occupy respectable posi-

tions at home. A great number, I am quite willing to admit, were deservedly sentenced for their crimes; but I daresay, could the statistics be procured and published, it would surprise one to find how many reformed under the influence of kind treatment, a ticket-of-leave, and prosperity. And to say the least, the manner in which our society gathers its skirts together for fear of contamination from the children or grandchildren of one who made but a single error, and spent the rest of an honest lifetime in endeavouring to redeem it, is most deplorable, and uncharitable in a Christian people. As for you English people, you don't take the trouble to make any distinction at all. Everybody is either a convict or perhaps some relation to one."

The travellers now emerged from the sandy, wooded country through which their road had hitherto lain, and entered upon a large extent of richly-grassed rolling downs and plains. Herds of cattle grazed quietly about or lay camped under the shade of clumps of trees, which here and there dotted the prairie. A chain of beautiful blue-peaked hills stretched away in the distance, bounding the view; while in the immediate neighbourhood of the road there arose abruptly from the surrounding plain a large, isolated, flat-topped mountain of imposing appearance, its rugged sides clothed with dense scrub.

The way seemed much longer across the plain than it had done through the forest country, and John was not sorry to see a thick belt of timber, which they at first could only distinguish by its blackness, becoming more and more distinct. A couple of miles beyond the edge of the timber brought them to a large gate in a paddock-fence, entering through which they made their way up to the station.

Ungahrun was one of the finest stations in the district. The elder Fitzgerald had taken it up twenty years previously, when the country was

entirely unknown, except to a few hardy pioneers who, like himself, had pushed beyond the frontiers of the gradually extending civilisation, and had braved the dangers of want of food, sickness, and hostility from the aboriginals; and his son, who now welcomed John West so heartily to its hospitality, had imbibed a love of its sylvan beauties with his mother's milk. On the soft flower-strewn sward he had rolled bareheaded, barefooted, a rosy, chubby-cheeked child. On the banks of the creek which flowed past his father's door he had sat for hours watching the finny inhabitants of its waters as they darted to and fro; or plunging head foremost beneath its cooling wave, imitated their motions with almost equal dexterity. Every spot on the large tract of country included in his father's run was familiar to him, and associated with some early memory. Up by that clump of river-oaks he stole quietly, when, possessing himself of a gun for the first time, he slipped out, determined to demonstrate his ability to use it. That was the very tree he fired from. How proudly his heart beat as he picked up his wild ducks, and returned home with the spoil! Down in the sand there he had mounted his first buck-jumper. And as he grew older, action succeeding action, and memory following memory, contributed to endear its scenes to his mind.

The house was the finest that John had yet seen in the bush. It was built, like all the others, of hardwood slabs, but considerable trouble had been taken in the erection. It was one-storeyed, but twice the length of the Cambaranga house, and a splendid broad veranda ran round the whole building. Its doors and windows were of that kind known in the bush as French lights. The iron roof was raised on double wall-plates, to allow a constant current of air to pass through, thus securing thorough ventilation and coolness.

Fitzgerald led the way past the house to a little cottage beside it, covered in bush fashion with roses and other creepers, saying, with a half laugh, "I daresay you will think it funny that we don't live in the *cawbawn humpy* (big house); but you see, after my father built it, he could not make up his mind to quit the little one in which he had lived so many years; and now that he and my mother have gone to live in Sydney, it is too large for my use." Dismounting at the door amongst greetings from dogs of all kinds, and the inevitable blacks, they unsaddled their horses, and after washing their backs, turned them loose in the paddock. A man now came out of the cottage and bade good evening to Fitzgerald, who welcomed him heartily.

He was, as John soon discovered, a buyer of fat cattle for a boiling down company, which consumed most of the Ungahrun fats.

"Well, Thompson, back for more cattle?"

"Yes; how are you off?"

"Oh, I think we can let you have a draft of a couple of hundred pretty fair."

"Well, I'm glad of that, for we are running short. I was half afraid that you might have disposed of this year's draft as the Bindarobina and Barham Downs people have done. Some of these gold-field butchers have been round, I know, buying up."

"They came here, too," said Fitzgerald; "but they wanted to buy on bills, and I didn't quite like the look of things, so I stuck to the bullocks."

"All right," said Thompson. "Can you go out to-morrow?"

"Oh yes, as soon as you like; but come in now."

The cattle-buyer was a strong, bronzed, intelligent-looking man, with a long beard. He was dressed in moleskin breeches and "jockey" boots. A crimson shirt, open at the throat, completed his attire.

His brawny arms, which the rolled-up sleeves of his shirt disclosed, were as black as the dark sunburnt neck and throat.

"Oh," he said, "there's another fellow here also: I don't know who he is; but I picked him up on the road, and he came with me. He's a queer-looking stick, but not a bad fellow."

The person alluded to now came up, and introduced himself to Fitzgerald by the name of "Williams." He said he was travelling down the country, and begged for a night's entertainment, which the kind-hearted young fellow willingly accorded.

The party entered the little paling-enclosed veranda of the cottage, and discussed matters pending the preparation of the evening meal.

It presented a very bachelor-like appearance. On the floor in one corner lay a saddle beside a heap of horse-hair, intended for the stuffing of its panel. A number of horse-shoes lay in another; straps and surcingles dangled from various pegs; a half-completed stock-whip hung beside the door; and odd spurs and different kinds of bits and stirrup-irons lay about in every direction.

The stranger made himself rather agreeable. He was an Englishman, and had been a few years in the colony. He said he had been employed on a station further north, and was going down for a spell. He looked yellow and unhealthy, and occasionally was attacked with some nervous disorder, which made him contort his face in the most dreadful manner, and throw his arms wildly about—after which he would go on talking as if nothing had happened.

Having betaken themselves outside to inspect the station, John and Williams were immediately accosted by a great hulking black fellow, who, detecting a raw look about them, came up begging for "tombacco." John had none to give; but Williams, who was a smoker, put his hand into his pocket, and was about

to bestow a small piece on the sable beggar, when suddenly his infirmity came upon him with great force. Twisting his face diabolically, he waved his arms round like a windmill. The black fellow merely gave one look, then taking to his heels he fled, glancing over his shoulder occasionally, and spitting, as their manner is when followed, as they think, by evil spirits.

In spite of his feeling for Williams, John could not avoid being much amused at the precipitate action which had followed the lazy, listless manner of the aboriginal, — and indeed, on recovering, Williams joined heartily in the laugh. A bullock-bell rung by hand, now announced that supper awaited them; and soon the small party, being joined by a young man, who acted as a kind of overseer on the station, gathered round the table in the unpretending little room.

Boiled salt-junk, with *fat hen* (a kind of indigenous spinach) and potatoes, washed down with copious draughts of tea, poured out of a huge tin teapot, formed the supper, and was much appreciated. The guests, following the example of their host, sat, as is customary at a bachelor's table, in their shirt-sleeves, or rather with them rolled up.

"I say, West," said Fitzgerald, "we had better luck last night. I don't know how it is, but I can never get a cook to make up anything but salt-junk. Now these Miss Grays, they knock up something good in no time."

Here Thompson, who was on intimate terms with his host, advised him to go in for an assistant manager to look after home affairs. "By Jove! Fitz, it's a shame to see that house empty and you a bachelor."

"Very good advice, old boy," returned the latter; "go ahead with a good example—I'll follow;" so saying, he got up and commenced filling his pipe.

Very soon the little room was filled with heavy clouds of tobacco-smoke, the position of each being only to be guessed at by the voice.

"Did you hear of that murder by the blacks on the Nelson River the other day?" asked Williams, addressing Fitzgerald.

"No," said he; "what was it?"

"Why, they stuck up Wilson's station there, and murdered the man and woman in the kitchen; they then planted inside the house, and waited until Wilson came home at night with his stockman. Then they rushed out, knocked old Wilson on the head, and drove a spear through the man's side. He managed, however, to jump on a horse which happened to be handy, and escaped to the next station. Some of the men got together and went over, but the niggers had gone, after gutting the store. They found the bodies frightfully mutilated, and buried them."

"They're a bad lot of devils those Nelson blacks," remarked Thompson. "Did the native troopers go after them?"

"Yes, they had started when I left, but I didn't hear how they got on."

"How far is it from here?" asked John.

"About three hundred miles."

"And do the blacks come in about the stations as they do here?"

"Oh dear no," answered Thompson. "After you get out about one hundred and fifty miles beyond this you won't see a nigger unless it be a civilised fellow with his master."

"You see this is the way of it, West," explained Fitzgerald. "When a squatter goes into new country he is very often short-handed, besides which, on a sheep-station, the shepherds are scattered in ones and twos over an immense extent of country. Now the blacks are numerous. They have nothing to do but

to fight and hunt; and if they knew the actual state of the white man's affairs, they would take advantage of it to come down at any moment and massacre all hands. On that account it is highly necessary they should be kept in the dark as to what is going on in the run. They are therefore driven back to the mountains and scrubs; and it is only after ten or twelve years have elapsed, when they have learnt to dread the white man's arms, and have become more tolerant of his presence, that they are cautiously admitted on the stations. Of course there is a constant state of simmering warfare between the two races. The black kills a white man, or a number, when he gets the chance, and the white man revenges it by going out alone, or sending out a force of black fellows, mounted and trained as irregular cavalry, under the command of a European officer, to shoot down as many of the offenders as they can. Every one carries firearms of one sort or another. They may never in their lives have occasion to use them, or they may be attacked on the very day when they have incautiously laid aside the hitherto constantly carried revolver."

"And do the native troopers fire willingly on their countrymen?" questioned John.

"Nothing can afford them greater pleasure," exclaimed Thompson; "and Government takes advantage of the hatred they bear to one another. For instance, men enlisted in this district are always employed in one at some distance away."

"Do they never unite against their officers?"

"No, I never heard of a case," answered the cattle-buyer. "They sometimes desert singly or in a body; but as a rule, a troop contains men from half-a-dozen different tribes, who, notwithstanding that they may have been comrades for many years, still secretly cherish their old tribal hatred for one another. The officer is, or should be, the friend of all, and in this way comes to the knowledge of any little plot that

may be brewing in his camp; and besides which, he has a certain source of information in the police *gins*—*i.e.*, the men's wives; they generally discover what is going on, and, woman-like, cannot rest until they have told it."

"Are there many of these men employed in the country?" pursued John.

"I think," replied Fitzgerald, "there may be from 200 to 250, but not more. Each detachment of eight or ten troopers has a white officer and a white camp-sergeant, who superintends the distribution of rations, has charge of the barracks when the officer happens to be away on patrol, and whose wife usually cooks for him when at home. These detachments are scattered over an immense extent of territory. The police districts into which the country is divided are enormously large, a patrol having often to travel many hundred miles before it returns to its barracks. On this account," continued Fitzgerald, "it frequently happens that when some aggression has been committed, the police are at a distance from the scene, and much valuable time elapses before they can arrive."

"And how do they proceed when they do arrive?" persisted young West, much interested.

"They inspect the scene of the outrage," said his friend, "and discover the foot-tracks made by the wild blacks. These they follow with the pertinacity of bloodhounds, and almost invariably overtake and punish the offenders. It sometimes occurs that other blacks join the original criminals after the perpetration of the crime, in which case, it being utterly impossible to distinguish the guilty from the innocent, all suffer alike."

"But," said John, "a single black fellow may alone deserve the punishment which, it seems, is inflicted on all indiscriminately."

"Yes; unfortunately it is so," said the young squat-

ter. "In unsettled districts the wild aboriginals are seldom seen except accidentally or in a case of this sort. They, as a rule, confine themselves to those portions of their wilds which, on account of their barrenness, are useless to the white men as pasture-grounds; and the principle we go on is to make a tribe responsible for the behaviour of its individual members. In truth, their almost communistic style of living utterly precludes the idea that any of their number could undertake any enterprise against the whites unknown to the others. The squatter and native police officer therefore condemn the whole."

"I should think," remarked John, "that under this system tribes are being gradually annihilated."

"Oh, not so much as you would think," broke in Thompson. "The niggers are so active and cunning in making use of trees, rocks, and long grass as shelter, that very many escape altogether, after which the tribe remains quiet, probably for a considerable time."

"Are they very savage in their natural state?"

"They are; and yet when the humour seizes them they can be kind enough," returned the cattle-buyer, who had large experience on the outside country. "I've known men who were well treated when found by them utterly exhausted from want of food and water. I myself," he continued, "have reason to speak well of their kindness, for some of them suffered me to escape once when I had got among them, and showed me all the attention which lay in their power."

"Give us the yarn, Thompson," urged Fitzgerald; "here's West dying to hear some romantic adventures."

"All right," said the other; "it will give him an idea of what may happen to himself some of these days." So saying, he filled his pipe and began his tale.

CHAPTER XII.

THE CATTLE-BUYER'S YARN.

"I WAS 'Super' of a sheep-station up north two years ago, and had got along very well without having come into collision with the blacks. The station had been formed for about six years, and those who had taken it up and managed it before my time had been equally fortunate. Some of the neighbours had had men killed and sheep driven away, but we always escaped. We had grown so careless as to have given up carrying firearms about the head-station; and even the shepherds were in the habit of going unarmed, although living far away from each other.

"Having gone out one evening to count the sheep at one of the sheep-stations, I was surprised to come across a strange flock, evidently unshepherded, grazing, and scattered through the bush in the vicinity of the yard. On examining them, they proved to be a flock which had been shepherded by a man living with his wife and child at another hut eight or ten miles away.

"I guessed that something had gone wrong: the man had gone to sleep perhaps, and the flock had gradually fed away without his knowledge, and on awaking he had not been able to find them; or he had got separated in some silly way from his charge, and they having been shepherded at this sheep-station before, made their way back to their favourite old beat. The thought of blacks being on the run never entered my mind.

"As soon as I had counted the sheep and secured the strange flock in an empty yard, I started down the creek to the sheep-station hut where lived Donnelly, the shepherd of the wandering flock, with his wife and child. It was a calm, balmy, moonlit night, and as I rode through the silent bush no sound was heard save the mournful wailing shriek of the wild curlew as it rose, shriller and shriller, until, fading away, its plaintive cry was lost in the forest-depths; or, when startlingly near, arose the prolonged howl of the dingo, echoed back again on all sides.

"There was something in the air as I approached the hut which caused my heart to sink. A foreboding of evil seized me as I rode up to the little dwelling which looked so weird-like in the ghostly moonlight.

"'Are you in, Donnelly?' I shouted.

"'Oh!' said a feeble voice, inside; 'who are you?'

"'Thompson. Don't you know me, Mrs Donnelly?'

"'Have you seen my husband?'

"My heart felt like a lump of lead. 'No,' I said, speaking as cheerfully as I could. 'Isn't he here?'

"'I haven't seen him since Monday morning' (this was Thursday night), 'and oh, I fear—I fear——' Here her sobs interrupted her.

"I still sat on my horse outside, for the conversation was being conducted with the door barred.

"'Did you hear or see anything to cause you alarm?' said I.

"'No; nothing. Only on Sunday night—the last night I saw him—the dogs howled the whole night through; and I was frightened, and he kissed me, and told me no harm should befall me while he was near. I fear—oh, I do not know what I fear. A snake may have bitten him, or he may have had sunstroke, or perhaps blacks may have been around the house watching him depart on Monday. My dear kind fellow!' Here she broke once more into a fit of weeping.

"'Now, Mrs Donnelly, you must hope for the best,' said I, not knowing well what to say; for the woman was distracted with grief, and half maddened with the weary watching of these awful days. She knew not the way through the trackless bush and over the mountains to the head-station. Her only hope was to sit still and wait; but oh, the agony of that waiting!

"'Oh, there is no hope, no hope! I knew it; I felt it when his sheep came home on Monday night without him, and the dog that loved him so brought them to the yard and went away; and she only came back to-day, wherever she has been. Oh, if she could only tell! I kept the sheep two days in the yard and then I turned them out up the creek, in the hopes that they might go back to their old run, and so give notice of something being wrong.'

"'Now, Mrs Donnelly,' said I, 'if you like I'll ride in for help and be out the first thing in the morning, and track and find your husband; or if you feel frightened, I'll just lie down here and go in the morning.'

"'Don't wait,' implored the poor creature. 'Oh, go at once; it will save time, perhaps his life! Oh, pray, go! Never mind me. I'm not afraid for myself.'

"'Well, good night, and God keep you,' I uttered in a broken voice; for I'm hanged if the whole thing wasn't rather too much for me."

"No wonder," ejaculated his audience.

"Well, I pushed home that night and roused up the overseer, got fresh horses up and firearms cleaned and loaded. We took a man with us to shepherd poor Donnelly's flock, which we counted when we arrived at the yards. *They were seven short.* From that time I had little hope, although I said nothing.

"We called at the sheep-station hut just to give the poor woman the comfort of knowing we were doing what we could. Then we searched until we found the tracks of the shepherd as he followed his flock

out to pasture on that Monday morning. The sheep in coming home had, as their nature directs them, chosen a different route, so that the tracks were not obliterated. Slowly keeping on the track (for a man does not make much of a mark on hard ground, and we had no blackboy), we followed until we came to a large river, into which the sheep-station creek emptied itself, considerably lower down. 'Ah,' thought I, 'they came here to drink. Yes, here's their camp: they camped here during the heat of the sun.' The tracks now led down to the bank of the river, where I lost them among the hard shingle and gravel. My companion and I searched carefully along the banks, but there were no tracks of the man returning; then they led down to the water's edge, and there we lost them. The river was here broad and rocky; a waste mountainous country lay on the other side. There was no inducement for him to cross. Suddenly the overseer raising his head uttered a short ejaculation.

"'Found anything?' I asked, quickly.

"Silently he pointed in the air. Words could have conveyed no more significance than that gesture. Circling in the air were numbers of carrion-kites, while others sat on trees, either gorged, or waiting to commence a banquet of horror. What that meant my throbbing heart only too surely told me. A long island, clothed with thick vegetation, lay between us and the other shore; and it was above the furthest channel that the birds of evil omen flew.

"Hastily stripping, and tying up our horses, we grasped our revolvers and forded the first stream. We searched up and down the island, looking for what we feared to find. Nothing was to be seen. At last I cast my eyes on the other stream. *Something* there was there. Yes — *something*. What is it? Is it a sheep? No. O God! now I see. It is a naked body, on its face, jammed in between the rocks, the poor stiff legs moving up and down with the rapid

current. I cooeyed. The overseer came hastily. My face told him.

"'Where is it?' he breathed, in a fearful whisper.

"I pointed at the dreadful *it*.

"'The head! Look, it has no head!' he cried.

"I looked again. It was true. The bare neck-bone stood out several inches above where the flesh had been cut. Somehow I felt relieved. It was bad enough to have to view the swollen, festering, sun-blistered corpse; but at that moment I felt that to look on the sodden, water-bleached face, with the ghastly goggle eyes and tangled dripping locks, would have been more than I could stand.

"Well, we cleared out of that fast enough, you may depend. I sent my companion to bring in the woman to the head-station, while I myself rode off to despatch letters calling for the assistance of the native police. I then got a couple of more men, and taking a wool-sack and pick and shovel, we went back to give poor Donnelly Christian burial. We waded out and managed to slip some bagging under the corpse, and brought him ashore. Alas! he was shockingly mutilated. And there, on his left side, the little round hole too surely told where the deadly spear had penetrated. His head we could not find. We buried him under a river-oak of that darkly timbered island. And the dense underwood, amid which had lurked his savage slayers, now shelters the lonely grave where, unheeded by all save One, that disfigured clay lies."

"What became of the poor woman?" asked his hearers.

"The overseer brought her in. She received the news of her husband's death in a dull stupid sort of manner, as if hearing without understanding. She had apparently lost all interest in life. She sat all day by herself, rocking to and fro, with the poor fatherless child clasped tightly to her bosom. We made a subscription for the poor creature, and sent

her down to her friends, who lived in Sydney; but since then I have heard nothing of her."

"Now, then, have some more Hennessy," said Fitzgerald, pushing the brandy-bottle towards Thompson, "and tell us how you got mixed up with the niggers; and after that I'll tell you of an adventure which befell me about three months ago."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CATTLE-BUYER'S YARN CONTINUED.

"I TOLD you that I had sent off for the native police," commenced the ex-Super after a deep draught of "three-star," judiciously qualified, though by no means drowned, with water. "Well, they came after about a week had elapsed. I might have followed the trail myself, with some of our men: but in the first place, I feared that we were not strong enough for the natives, who were evidently in large numbers; and in the second, I could not be certain that my own men would not report the occurrence to Government, in which case, supposing any of the wretches to have been knocked over, I would in all probability have had to stand my trial for murder.

"The detachment came at last, and although officers of police are supposed to allow no whites to accompany them, yet being well known to the sub-inspector in charge, he was only too glad of my company for a few days.

"The boys of the troop, on arriving at the spot where I had lost the tracks on the shingle, spread out, and their acute eyesight enabled them to read the characters on the earth as one would a printed book.

"'Here, Mahmy,' said one to his chief—'here that been cut him head off. You mil-mil (see) blood.'

"I shuddered. There, now that it was pointed out to me, on the very stone I had sat down on when stripping to search for the body, the blood-stains were

plain. They spattered the dead leaves, and stained the grass-stalks.

"Well, we started on the tracks, overtook the retreating tribe, gave them a sound punishment, and returned home. Other duties soon effaced the memory of the affair, and we concluded that for some time at least nothing would be heard of the offending blacks. The season proved a very dry one, and I found myself obliged to erect temporary yards and huts on the very outskirts of the run, in order to make use of hitherto unoccupied ground. One station in particular I had caused to be built several miles up the river, beyond the spot now known as 'Donnelly's grave.' It was difficult of access. A short distance above that well-remembered spot, the mountains closed so abruptly on both sides of the creek, that the only passage lay among the rough boulders and shingle of the river-bed. I had been up counting the sheep, and left the hut at dark on my road home. The distance before me was about sixteen miles. I rode along, my mind occupied with conjectures as to the best disposal of my sheep during the trying drought. The road now turned down into the river-bed, and picking his way the best he could, my horse cheerfully jogged on his homeward path. The mountains towered in shadowy gloom on either side above me as I rode along the side of the river, which, although considerably shrunk by reason of the summer droughts, churned and foamed as its rapid current forced its way through its rock-barred channel. Occasionally the track led through clumps of river-oak saplings and bushes, emerging from which I could discover a bare patch of sand, and beyond that shadow. My horse knew the road, however, and I cared not; half my time was spent in similar lonely rides, and I was not nervous. I was getting mightily hungry, however, besides which, the mail-man was expected at the station, and I longed to read my home letters. My horse's shoes clattered

against the stones as I stuck my spurs into his sides to urge him onward. A sudden turning in the road now showed me a number of small fires glowing ahead. But that they were stationary, I should have been inclined to think them caused by fire-flies. On my left there were more. The sudden turning of the river had placed some in front and some behind, and hitherto the thick groves of flooded oak had hidden them from my sight. On my right frowned an overhanging crag. I drew my rein; perhaps (for blacks often chatter loudly in their camps) they had not heard me. I listened. Not a sound save the rushing, tumbling, river-current. It was, after all, perhaps only the remains of a bush-fire. Some of the logs were still alight, and the night air had fanned the embers into a glow. Again I listened intently. If blacks really were in the camp, they must have heard me coming; no doubt they had barrred the way ahead and behind. The broken river-channel forbade my trusting to flight. What should I do? Not three miles away lay poor Donnelly their victim, in his cold grave of wet river-sand. What was his fate then might be mine in a few minutes. I determined to keep still and wait for what might turn up. Presently I heard bushes rustling some distance behind, and the voice of a black fellow, uttering, in that strange tone in which the wild savage first pronounces English words, 'Boodgeree;' and again 'Boodgeree, white fellow' (good, good white fellow). The sound startled me. They were here, and looking for me. I drew my pistol. Some of them should have daylight through them, I inwardly vowed, if it came to a final struggle. Now I heard their low rapid utterances, in various excited tones, in front, behind, and above me, — the word 'white fellow' being repeated often. Escape was hopeless. There was one chance for life in the inconsistency of their behaviour. I determined to put a bold face on the matter, appear at home,

laugh and talk with them, and if the worst came, sell my life as dearly as possible. Accordingly I shouted, 'Hey! come on boodgeree you, my boys, come along!' and a great deal more nonsensical talk, which they could not have understood, but which served as well as anything else to show the confidence which I tried to gull them into believing I yet possessed. The effect was magical. A simultaneous shout came from those nearest. All around, in fifty different places, as many voices broke into an unintelligible jargon; while from the camp, the noise of women's voices could be heard as they shrilly inquired what was going on, and tendered advice or admonition.

"Knowing how useless it was to do anything else, I sat still on my horse, and in a few minutes was surrounded by a dense crowd of dark, savage-eyed, wild men, all fully armed with native weapons. More kept coming. There was a perfect Babel of sounds. The gloom was so great that I could only distinguish the dark moving figures and the long spears, or occasionally the glint of a pair of fierce glittering eyes, shining out of a paint-bedaubed visage. Now they felt me all over. On feeling the pistol, which I had returned to my belt, the man who discovered it said something to the others, who became still more excited. They now led me, still sitting on my horse, across a ford of the river to their camp. And now for the first time I could see the faces of my captors; and wild and devil-like they looked as the fires threw their light across them. Thick masses of curly black hair, low foreheads, short noses, large white teeth, and short beards on the upper lip and chin, seemed to strike me most; their eyes gleamed in the fire-blaze like burning coals. A tall man, looking at me earnestly for some minutes, now commenced an animated harangue; pointed to me several times, then pointing up the river, imitated the sound of a gun being fired, pointed to himself, and finished by addressing me

rapidly at great length. From his manner I guessed that he was friendly to me for some cause or other, why, I could not make out, but I determined to take advantage of the turn in my favour. My tall friend now made signs that I should dismount: this I did at once. I had made up my mind to trust my protector implicitly, and at any rate not to show fear. I was by no means easy, however, as my sable friend led me through the scattered fires, surrounded by a number of blacks, who, as far as I could guess, seemed to coincide with him in his views regarding me. Most of the mob had departed to the fires which appeared behind me when I first came upon the natives.

"I found that there were two camps at a distance of about two hundred yards apart, and my people belonged to the small camp. We now arrived at a fire which, from the signs made, I found was owned by the tall fellow with me. He made a series of gestures, by which I understood him to intimate that I was to partake of his hospitality. The only word of English he knew was 'white fellow.' This he repeated many times. Sometimes he pointed to me, then to himself, patted his breast and smiled; then he would point to the distant camp, and shake his head, and frown. Sometimes he pointed to himself, imitated the sound of a shot, pointed to my pistol, then up the river, then again to me, looking eagerly at me to see whether I comprehended him or not. I knew not what he meant, but I feigned to understand him, and nodded, smiled, patted him, and repeated the word 'boodgeree' two or three times. He at once caught up the word and pronounced it distinctly, and seemed much pleased. Things now seemed on a much more satisfactory footing. My entertainer produced some black-looking kangaroo-meat, which he warmed on the hot ashes, then tearing off a piece with his strong teeth, he offered it to me. Knowing how

necessary it was to keep up the terms of friendship, I accepted it with much cordiality, and though almost sick, managed to eat a portion of the dirty-looking food. A drink of honey and water was now offered me in a *cooleman*, which I also politely accepted. After the repast a number of aboriginals from the neighbouring fires gathered around me, and from their language seemed to be making fun of me. One fellow especially seemed a great wit. The slightest word of his sufficed to set the others in a roar of laughter. Still it all seemed to be of a good-humoured nature. Presently my tall acquaintance, pointing over to the other camp, made signs that there was a *corroborree* to be danced. I understood, and nodded. Then he gave me to understand that he and I would go together; to this I also assented. Soon after this a long clear cry arose from the other camp like pir-r-r-r-r-r-r. A general movement now took place among the men and women of the camp in which I was. They gathered in a body, each one covered from head to foot in a 'possum-skin cloak. I arose with my host, who bestowed on me a cloak, and we took our places a little on one side of the rest. Another signal arose from the distant camp, and, as if in obedience to it, my neighbours commenced to march slowly forward towards whence the sound proceeded. Slowly, silently, solemnly, they marched, their bodies bent almost double, which position my friend signed me to observe. There was something very unearthly in this phantom-like procession,—the dusky, indistinct, muffled forms gliding noiselessly forward through the midnight woods, sometimes entirely lost in the shade of a large tree, and again emerging, to be lost again.

"Fears began to take possession of me. Why was this singular method of approaching the *corroborree* ground observed? I had heard of ceremonies of a dark and secret character being practised amongst those tribes at which no white man ever was present,

Was such a one to take place now? Was my life only spared before that it might be sacrificed now? My blood began to curdle, and my flesh to creep. I thought of flying, forgetting for the moment the utter impossibility of getting away from the nimble-footed sharp-eyed savages. My tall friend, however, seemed to divine my intentions, for he patted my breast, then pointed to himself assuringly, then to the large camp of natives which we were nearing, and shook his head, spitting with apparent disgust, and once more patted himself and me. I could not exactly tell what he was driving at, but it seemed to indicate friendly intentions towards myself, and that the other camp was occupied by a hostile tribe. This I afterwards learnt was the case. We had approached within about a dozen yards of the dim fires towards which we had been making our way, when a similar signal to that already given was uttered by some one in the other camp. Upon this my companions, still retaining their bent position, turned their faces towards their own camp, and remained waiting, and of course I followed their example. Another cry succeeded, and almost immediately a bright blaze followed, illuminating the dark woods in a ruddy circle. Flinging off their coverings, and turning simultaneously round, the crowd of blacks about me gave vent to a general deep 'Ah!' of wonder and surprise, not unmixed with a superstitious fear.

"I understood it all now. The tribe were being initiated in a *corroborree* they had never seen before. At the same time it commenced. A half-circle of fires burned brightly in front of us. Between us and the fires were seated rows of women, across whose knees were lightly stretched their 'possum cloaks. They held boomerangs in their hands, which they beat together as they sang, keeping the most exact time, occasionally varying the accompaniment by beating

on the skins, producing a drum-like noise. On the far side of the fire a row of forked stakes had been driven into the ground, and poles laid on the forks, about six feet above the ground. About twenty savages, painted in the most grotesque fashion, were seated all round this rail. Their long hair was tied tightly in a knot on the top of their heads, from the middle of which rose a tuft of cockatoo crests. The soft white down from the breast of the same bird clung to their eyebrows, moustaches, and beards. A red fillet passed round the forehead and encircled the head. Their bodies were painted with pipeclay to imitate skeletons. Boomerangs, stone tomahawks, and knives hung from their girdles. Holding their elbows close to their sides, they moved their forearms and hands in a segment of a circle from their waist to their ears, first the right, then the left, in time to the barbarous chant. Beyond these, the chief figures in the assembly, stood a dense crowd of fierce-eyed sable warriors leaning on their spears. Looking round, I found that the men of my party had assumed the same attitude, while the women had taken up a position a little apart.

"In spite of the feeling of insecurity and alarm with which my position filled me,—for I knew that all present would think nothing of knocking me on the head if the whim seized them,—I felt rather amused at the absurd climax of their preparations, and its monotony soon got tiresome to themselves. Jumping down from their perch, the painted savages cleared away their posts and rails, and commenced one of the usual *corroborree* dances of the country, in which they were joined by many others, who had taken no part in the first performance.

"My tall friend, spreading his rug on the ground, planted a spear at each corner and sat down, motioning me to take a place beside him—all the others

following his example. The dance was now most vigorously prosecuted, and it carried with it a certain amount of dramatic effect. Issuing from the dark background of solemn gloom, the mass of vague dusky shadows danced their way into the circle illuminated by the fire, their hands held in front of their breast, after the manner of kangaroos, their bodies bent, and their feet stamping. As they got nearer the fires which divided them from the orchestra, the singing and dancing became more energetic, till at last a brilliant blaze having been produced, by means of dry leaves kept on purpose, the whole culminated in much stamping, quivering of legs and shaking of heads, winding up with an almost instantaneous disappearance of the whole party into surrounding darkness. This was repeated for hours, and I thought they never would leave off. At last all seemed to weary, and my tall friend and his followers returned to their own ground, taking me with them. Here I found my horse ready. After a good deal more of talk, and many gestures, he signified that I might go. I stripped myself almost naked in making presents. Then seizing his weapons, he called on a friend to accompany him, and both came with me as an escort. I had little difficulty in persuading them to proceed all the way; and they were so much pleased with their treatment that they asked permission to bring their tribe in, which they did, and we had no more difficulties afterwards."

"That was a capital fellow, that long nigger," said Fitzgerald. "Did you ever find out why he took a fancy to you?"

"Oh," said Thompson, laughing, "that was all a mistake on his part. It seems that when up the river in pursuit of the tribe which killed poor Donnelly, he happened to be among the crowd we attacked. He had hidden himself under a log upon which I had taken up my position. He said that

I kept looking at him, but allowed him to escape, and it was in gratitude for this supposed service that he saved my life."

"Then you did not know that he was under the log?" asked John.

"Not I," returned the other. "It would, I am afraid, have been a bad day for both of us had I done so. And now, Fitzgerald, give us your yarn."

"It's getting late," the young man said, "and you know we must be up early; but the story is a short one." So saying, he narrated as follows.

"I suppose you know that I'm a beak—I mean, that I'm on the Commission of the Peace. I was appointed about two years and a half ago. Shortly after my appointment I was over in the little township of Yering, not far from here, and a desperate row occurred between two men. One of them seizing an axe struck the other on the head, causing instantaneous death. I happened to be near the scene of the fatal struggle, and made one to seize the murderer; and being very zealous in the discharge of my duties, like most young hands, made myself perhaps too officious in the matter. At any rate, on leaving the court, after committal for trial by my brother magistrates and myself, the murderer vowed to be revenged on me for the share which I had taken in the business. I thought nothing more of it, and time passed on. About four months ago I was obliged to start from here up north on some business connected with a station belonging to my father. It had been only recently formed, and the natives had the reputation of being very treacherous in the district. My business led me to a neighbouring station, and as I believed that the way by the road was very much longer than the actual distance as the crow flies, I determined to hit out straight across the bush. It was nearly dinner-time when I set out, and I had about forty miles to go. I had gone about twenty miles, when I got into a nasty intricate coun-

try, with a good deal of thick scrub, in which I got entangled, and it was a couple of hours after dark before I got clear. I now pushed on as well as I could in the dark, but got so very sleepy that I had made up my mind to lie down until morning, when the sound of voices made me prick up my ears, and on moving forward a little, found myself close to a large camp of niggers. Well, I was luckier than you, Thompson, for I managed to get away without their hearing me, and I pushed on, for sleep had fled. I had gone about ten miles further when my horse struck into a little path, and the smell of sheep convinced me that I was near some sheep-station hut, or *bark gunyah*. Dogs now barked furiously, and a man shouted, which I immediately answered. I rode up, unsaddled and hobbled my horse, and walked in.

"Who do you think the man was? It was my friend the homicide. The meeting was startling to both. The wild look of the man, with his gun in his hand (he had seized it on hearing the noise made by the dogs), at first led me to believe that he meant to fulfil his vows of vengeance; but suddenly flinging it into a corner, he sat down, covered his face with his hands, and wept. When he grew calmer he told me that he had been sentenced to nearly two years' imprisonment, and had come straight here from prison; but he begged my forgiveness, and said I had only done my duty. I camped with him that night, and next morning made the station."

"By Jove!" said John, "I think it must have been horrid to meet that fellow in such a lonely place."

"Well, yes, I didn't like it," returned his friend.

The party now separated to obtain some sleep before the arduous work of mustering commenced.

CHAPTER XIV.

MUSTERING FATS FOR THE BUTCHER—DRAFTING ON THE CAMP.

THE dawn was barely visible when our hero was awakened by hearing a sound of conversation near him. It was Fitzgerald giving orders to one of the blackboys.

"Horses in the yard, Peter?"

"Yohi."

"Bugler and Gaylad in?"

"Yohi."

"All right. Take down my bridle and the bridle which belongs to that gentleman who came with me last night, and send them up."

"Yohi, Missa Fitzgell. Me ride 'im, Charcoal. That fellow boodgeree kallopp."

"Very well; and tell one of the other boys to catch Forrester for Mr Thompson."

John now jumped out of bed, and hurrying on his things, made his way outside. The sun had not risen, but everybody was astir. Blackboys were bringing up horses from a yard in the paddock, into which they had all been driven. Breakfast was being carried in, and every one was preparing for the day's work. After a hasty meal was disposed of, the horses were saddled. The little court in front of the houses was crowded with horses awaiting their riders. The party consisted of Fitzgerald, Thompson, West, two white stockmen, one of whom was Fitzgerald's lad Tommy. Besides

these and their horses, Mr Williams's saddle and pack horse swelled the number.

A general mount was now effected, and, bidding good-bye to his entertainer, Williams started on his way down country.

"Now, Tommy," said Fitzgerald, speaking to the youth just mentioned, "we are going to divide. You, with Mr Thompson and Billy Barlow, can go up to the Peaks, then start down, bringing all you see worth taking along with you. Send Billy over to Oakey Creek, and let him meet you down at Plumtree Camp. You can clean out the middle branch of the station creek, and then bring all you find down to the main camp, where you will find us."

These directions, which, perhaps, may seem unintelligible to the general reader, referred to the manner in which the young squatter proposed to gather together the cattle among which he expected to collect the bullocks he required.

The two parties now separated—Fitzgerald with his assistants to examine the southern branch of the main creek, together with the country lying between the many tributaries which flowed into it; while the others were to direct their attention to the opposite side and the surrounding country. It was most exhilarating riding along in the cool morning air. How pleasant the fresh smell of the grass! Now they pass through a small patch of Brigalow scrub. Some one has split a piece from the trunk of a small tree. What a scent the dark-grained wood has! What numbers of wallabies! They start out in every direction, and flying across the path swiftly disappear. We are in grass once more. Whirr-r-r-r— a covey of quail start from under the horses' feet, fly a short distance, and alight on the thick grass. There are some cattle standing in their camp on a small patch of scrub. We don't want them, however—we can get them any day. Here is one standing by himself. It is a two-

year-old steer—a white one. He stands perfectly still; his hanging head and tucked-up body betray his want of health. As we ride past he shows the white of his eye, and gathering up his strength, he gives a deep hollow cough which rakes his whole frame. "Pleura," said Fitzgerald, reading John's inquiring glance; "we always have it more or less on the run."

"Does it not carry off immense numbers of cattle?"

"Well, it has done so; but for some years past we find its ravages have been nothing to speak of. A great deal has been written on the subject. Some have proposed preventing the attacks of the disease by inoculation; others, again, laugh at the idea. For my part, I am convinced that pleura lurks in every herd in the country, and that it only wants favourable conditions to make its appearance."

"What are these conditions?" asked John.

"Much knocking about invariably produces it; for instance, it often breaks out amongst cattle on a long journey, or that have been herded long. It is also much more severe among cattle feeding on rich swampy pastures than on the high hilly stations. Besides which, there is no doubt, I think, that it is both contagious and infectious, and, of course, some constitutions have a hereditary tendency to it."

Now they emerge on a plain bounded by scrub, with openings between the patches, and vistas of plains and more scrub in the distance. On the plain, about half a mile away on the right, a large herd of cattle are scattered, gently feeding towards their camp. What a delightful spot for a gallop! How fresh the horses are! Gaylad feels as if he could devour the space between him and that beautiful blue chain whose distant peaks glitter in the morning sunshine. "Way, horse; steady, Gaylad,—you'll have your work to do by-and-by." See, there is a plain turkey, quite close; he walks steadily along, keeping his head up and his eye fixed on us. He is quite within shot.

There, there, unobserved before, but almost under your horse's feet, is his mate. Startled by the horses, she quickens her pace, breaks into a run, opens her large wings, beats the air two or three times, and rising, wings her way heavily off, followed almost immediately by her companion, uttering a kind of hoarse croak. There they light again, not a quarter of a mile away. Now we come to a water-course. It is a succession of longish holes filled with clear water. Trees, with drooping branches like willows, fringe its sides. The broad leaf of the lotus, amid which rises here and there the beautiful flower, floats on the surface. Look at the wild ducks swimming in twos and threes. Stay for one instant. There, on that broad lotus-leaf, two or three little mites of wild ducklings are sitting. Their mother, with the rest of the family, is floating calmly beside them. Her quick eye notes us; she moves away, her little brood following. Now those on the leaf plunge in and swim bravely after her, shaking their little tails. The other ducks, catching the alarm, at once detect the cause. A sudden splash, a few frightened quacks, and away they fly, the water dripping brightly from their webbed feet as they rise, with the sunlight glinting on their dark-brown bodies and blue and bronze wings. There they go, out of sight in a minute. The mother and her brood have vanished in the same instant. You may search, but you will not find them. The little things understand diving as well as their mother, and the banks of the creek are one mass of sedges and long grass. Watch, here come the ducks back again.

High in the air they approach, following the course of the creek with the rapidity of lightning. Here they come, right overhead; a confused whizz denotes the speed they are travelling at, and down the water-course they take their way to alight in some undisturbed spot..

As you leave the water, pigeons of all kinds, from

the strong beautiful bronze-wing to the gentle squatter and little dove, fly from under your horse's feet, with strong rapid flapping noise, or sit crouching on the ground, humbly hoping that their insignificance and homely plumage will not attract attention. A white crane, and a few dark-feathered water-hens, at the far end of the water-hole, seeing you moving, conclude to stay. Here is the half-dried carcass of a beast. It died here on the camp near the water. Whew, what a smell! Any one who wants more than one whiff of that is a glutton. Look at that "booming 'guana!" He has been feeding sumptuously on the carrion. He is watching us with his "glittering eye," his head up, his vicious tongue darting out now and then like a serpent's fangs. He knows we are observing him; off he scuttles at an incredibly swift pace, making for that big iron-bark tree. Gallop after; hit him with your whip. Ah, you are too late! he has reached it before you; he is away up lying flat on a high branch. You can just see the end of his tapered tail hanging over, or his head, the tongue still striking venomously.

Now we emerge on still larger downs, dotted prettily with cotton bush. Cattle-tracks converge from all points to the water. They are quite narrow, like little footpaths. The ground bears on its surface the impressions of many feet. You cannot find a foot square without the print of a hoof of some age or another. The grass must be sweet here, the cattle keep it cropped down so closely. That long line of tall white-stemmed gum-trees marks the banks of the main creek; here is the junction of the southern and northern branches. We must cross and follow up this branch next us. Yonder is a mob of cattle; they are not so quiet as those we have already seen. Two or three old cows nearer us than the others lift their heads, smelling our approach. They turn and run. The old brutes, they know quite well what it is to be rounded up; they have been hundreds of times in the

yard; it is all roguery. Now that some of the rest notice them running, they run also: had the old cows remained quiet the others would have been stationary too. Now they are making off in a body. Sam, the white stockman with the party, and Peter the black fellow, mounted on Charcoal, spur after them, get in front, and heading them, bring them to a stand-still. There are a dozen nice bullocks in the mob. After making them stand a little to cool them, Peter is sent to take them over the river to a camp, where they may be picked up by the party on their return down the other side. The party divide once more in two. Sam and Peter go one way; John still remains with his friend, and they have two or three exciting gallops after different mobs. Gaylad is sweating now. What a little stunner he is! It will not be his fault if the cattle get away. He watches their every movement with a personal interest. Fitzgerald and John have got a good mob together. They have taken them across the creek, and are bringing them down the other side to pick up the cattle on the camps there. The bullocks and steers and heifers go along without much trouble; but some of those old cows with calves try all sorts of dodges to get away. They fear that we are mustering for branding. It will come soon enough. Let us get through with these fat cattle, then we shall set to work branding. There, that cunning old wretch of a cow has managed to to slip away with her calf, and she is making off for some scrub in the distance. Now, Gaylad; now, boy, fetch her back. Indeed Gaylad wants no bidding, but is flying over the ground at his best. Now he reaches the cow and her calf, a good strong six-months-old bull. She swerves away as the horse approaches. Now is your time, John; close on her, turn her, keep her head to the mob; give her a cut or two with your whip, and she will be amongst them once more. Ah! you do not know how to manage your rein:

your bridle-hand is fumbling with it; it is too loose; your whip is in your way. Gaylad flies past the cow about twenty yards; she once more makes off in her own direction. Once more John charges her with the same result, only that this time, as he holds the rein tighter, Gaylad, obeying the check, props round at the same instant the old cow does. John finds himself sitting on his horse's neck; it is a miracle how he holds on. He manages to get back to his seat, and confining operations to a trot, succeeds in heading the chase back towards the mob. He will punish her at any rate for the trouble she has given him. Two or three desperate cuts at the cow fall harmlessly, another only gets the lash under Gaylad's tail, who resents the indignity by kicking once or twice, humping his back, and nearly upsetting his rider. Now is a good chance; hit her hard. A vicious cut follows. Something catches the fall. "O heavens, my eye!" shouts John, with one hand up to that organ, which has suffered instead of the guilty animal.

Now a camp with a good many cattle on it has been reached. Sam and Peter have evidently been here, and are away after more. The cattle stop of their own accord, mingling with the rest, uttering many bellows of greeting. Fitzgerald proposes to wait for a little. What a thorough master of his work he looks, as with careless ease he sits side-saddle fashion on Bugler, his long whip hanging festooned round him! Hark! there goes a whip! The cattle on the camp recommence bellowing. Here they come down this gully—the bullocks and young cattle ahead, running towards those on the camp, roaring as they run. A mixed lot, with many cows and calves bring up the rear, after which come Sam and Peter, riding side by side. There are so many cows and calves, it is not advisable to drive them as far as the main creek. We don't intend taking them home for branding to-day. We cannot draft the bullocks out properly here

though; we require all hands for that. Let us keep as many as we can of the others back on the camp, therefore, when they start. It is not quite easily done either; for with stranger perversity those even who wanted to stay behind previously now desire to go along with the mob, and insist on following up, until they are effectually driven back to their camp. We have yet a large number, and still pick up more as we go along. Gaylad makes himself very busy in assisting to drive. Should any beast in his vicinity lag behind to crop a sweet morsel he marks him; then laying his ears back, with outstretched neck and open mouth, he rushes at the offender, inflicting sometimes a rather sharp bite. The loud pistol-like report of a stock-whip is heard again, this time ahead. The leading cattle quicken their pace. Bellows in the distance are answered by bellows from the mob. We come in sight of a large number of cattle standing close together on an open yet shady camp; and some distance apart, under a shady tree, are three horses. Their riders are lying on the ground. The two mobs mingle now, amid terrific roaring, as we ride up to the little party under the tree.

"Well, Thompson, had much luck?"

"Got about sixty or seventy head, I think."

"There are forty or fifty in our lot," said Fitzgerald; "we had better set to work at once. It will take all our time to get them drafted and yarded before it gets late."

Now they prepare for work. John, with the lad Tommy and Billy Barlow, is told off to ride round the cattle, and prevent them straggling off the camp. Peter is to look after the bullocks when separated from the main crowd; and Fitzgerald, Thompson, and Sam, are to draft. A few very quiet animals are driven out, and placed at about one hundred and fifty yards from the rest, to form a kind of nucleus mob for the bullocks to run into. Peter is in attendance to re-

ceive them when they come, and prevent their making back, or running away.

Now, threading his way through the masses of cattle, Fitzgerald selects one which his practised eye tells him is of the kind wanted, and, riding behind it, urges it quietly to the edge of the mob. Bugler knows his work, and loves it with all his heart. His undivided attention is given to the animal in front of him. He is aware that it is his duty to separate him from the herd, and he is determined to do it. Any dodging movement on the part of the bullock, as, looking from side to side, he approaches the outside ring, is met with a corresponding motion to balk it on the horse's part, revealing the intense interest he takes in his work. A slight raising of the bridle-hand, and Bugler makes a desperate rush. Startled, the beast singles out from the rest, but immediately tries to double back, and mix up with his fellows. In vain—Bugler's quick eye watches him too narrowly; he has turned in the same instant, and is racing alongside, between him and his bellowing mates. Now, so suddenly as to be almost instantaneous, the determined brute has stopped, wheeled round, and is going at a headlong pace the opposite way. But it is all of no use. The practised stock-horse props at the same moment, and still at speed bars the way. A few sharp cuts from Fitzgerald's whip decide the question, and the conquered creature joins a couple of his mates who have been taken out respectively by Thompson and Sam, and who are now running to mingle with Peter's charge.

Riding back slowly to breathe their nags, the drafters single out more of the particular class wanted, and the scene is repeated. The ground resounds with the rapid battering of the horses' feet, as, stretched at their utmost speed, the intelligent creatures assist their riders with all their might. It is a stirring scene, full of healthy enjoyment and wild excitement.

"How these Australian fellows do ride!" thought

John, as he notices the sudden dead-stop and sharp wheel, the rider sitting unmoved in his saddle. Look, there is a bullock which has proved too much for Thompson single-handed. He is a large roan bullock, with a red neck, and long, sharp, cocked horns. He is six or perhaps seven years old. He is one that has been missing from the run for the last year or two, and has been seen to-day for the first time during that period. Most probably he has been away in the scrub with a wild mob, and in an evil hour has taken it into his head to revisit his old haunts. His temper has not been improved by his association with the scrubbers. See, he turns on Thompson. What a narrow escape! Forrester manages to get out of his way, but receives an ugly scar on his thigh, which he will carry while he lives.

Sam now bears down to Thompson's assistance. Roaney is once again cut out of the mob. Watch—now—here! here! here they come! The wild-looking roan bullock endeavours to break back, while Sam races alongside, his body bent forward, uttering short, fierce, quick shouts, as, waving his hat in his hand, he seeks to intimidate the savage scrubber into sheering off from the main mob. What a pace they are going at! There they pass side by side between two trees, that barely allow them room. The leg of Sam's white moleskins brushes the fire-blackened trunk, and adopts its colour. A sudden fierce prop, and Roaney has shot behind Sam's horse, and succeeds in burying himself among the many-coloured bellowing herd. Sam rides slowly back, and, dismounting, slackens the girths of his steaming horse, who, with hanging head and quickly-heaving flanks, betrays the exertions he has made.

Thompson and Fitzgerald come up. "That's a nut," remarks the former.

"He's the dead finish—go right through a man,"

rejoins Sam, rather sulkily. "Blessed if he didn't —— near skiver my hoss!"

"Well, Sam, as soon as your horse gets his wind, you and I will tackle him," says Fitzgerald. "Our horses are the handiest. I wouldn't lose that fellow for a trifle. Ten to one, if we don't get him, after this knocking about he'll make back for the scrubs again."

In about ten minutes' time Sam and his master ride side by side through the crowded camp. At last they notice their savage friend pushing his way through a thick mob of cattle some distance from them.

"Now, Sam," says Fitzgerald, "as soon as we get him fairly out, I'll ride alongside and shoulder him, and you must keep close up and play on him with your whip."

"All right," growls Sam.

One or two essays are ineffectually made to rush out into the open the huge beast, whose hot blood is now boiling within him. At last he is out, and is again racing, with Fitzgerald alongside this time, to get back into the mob.

"Now, then, Sam!" shouts the squatter, as the clever bold horse, in obedience to his accomplished rider, closes on his horned antagonist, and, leaning over, presses all his weight against the scrubber's shoulder, edging him towards Peter's mob as they fly along. Sam, galloping at the creature's heels, has been waiting the word, and now commences a flagellation with his long twelve-footer, which compels the red-necked savage to keep his pace up, and gladly seek refuge among those already out.

It is now time to be making homewards, and the selected fat cattle are driven steadily in, and yarded for the night.

CHAPTER XV.

OUT AFTER SCRUBBERS—THROUGH THE BUSH—THE SOLEMN SCRUB—CAMPING OUT.

DAYLIGHT once more saw the Ungahrun household up and busy. Once more there was saddling in hot haste; a hurried meal; blankets and provisions strapped on to the pack-horse's saddle. Thompson was starting down with a draft of 110 head for the pots—prime fat cattle. Fitzgerald and John, with one of the men, accompany him for a few miles. The cattle are going quietly; even Roaney, who made one or two determined efforts to break away on his road in the previous night, is marching along steadily, now that he is off his own beat.

"I think you can get along all right now, Thompson," remarks the squatter. "I'll leave a man with you for to-day, and you can send him home to-morrow. Your own man and blackboy will be sufficient then."

Good-byes are exchanged—arrangements as to further drafts once more hurriedly gone over, and the Australian and his guest turn their horses' heads homewards. And now there is nothing to hinder the commencement of the usual half-yearly muster to brand. Fitzgerald is most anxious to try his luck amongst the scrub cattle, of which great numbers infest the vast scrubs which clothe the steep sides of the distant blue ranges. He has information that at one point many of these scrub cattle come out at night to

feed on the open plains, and he is desirous, if possible, of making a haul amongst them.

He explains to John that the scrubs are pieces of country, thickly covered for the most part with a luxuriant vegetation, affording an almost impenetrable shelter to the wild herds. Some of these densely timbered tracts enclose within their recesses a sufficiency both of water and feed to pasture considerable numbers without rendering it necessary for them to seek a livelihood outside its limits. It often happens, nevertheless, that, driven by drought, or tempted by the young and tender burnt feed, these denizens of the wood are found grazing on the clear country, but never at any great distance from cover, to which they can make on being disturbed.

These cattle are invariably part of a herd, or the descendants of a herd, which, neglected by its owners, was suffered to stray over the country at its pleasure, gradually becoming, owing to the absence of the restraining influence of the white man, and the onslaught of the black, as wild and fierce as the untamed bison-herds of America. Their instinct teaches them to select the most inaccessible fastnesses of the forest as their favourite haunts. Caution and cunning develop hand in hand with ferocity and fear. Their very appearance changes; and the second or third descendant of the well-bred, quiet, symmetrically-shaped favourite of the milking yard is almost always a long-legged, big-headed, coarse-horned runt.

These wild herds are justly considered as being a constant source of nuisance in the proximity of a cattle-run. Numbers of ill-shaped, badly-bred bulls wander among the quiet cattle, and the presence of the wild herd induces the desertion to the scrubs of many of its members. The raids made by the owners of stations on these outlaws depend very much as to the vigour of their prosecution on the value of cattle at the time being; and when the market price of ordinary quiet

stock is low, the scrubbers have little or no value; but should a demand arise, every cattle-owner makes desperate exertions to capture them. These clean-skins, as they are often called, to distinguish them from the branded cattle, are supposed to belong to the cattle-owner on whose run they emerge from their shelter; but when a large scrub is situated in the centre of several cattle-stations, they may be the property of any one. In fact, it seems to be a recognised axiom that "the smartest man gets the most." They are, nevertheless, the frequent cause of many heart-burnings and much jealousy.

Neighbours who have only sheep-stations, and therefore can have no right or interest, make descents on the scrub when out of beef; or perhaps, more trying still, an unprincipled publican, who has only been permitted by an act of courtesy on the squatters' part to erect a so-called hotel on the run, takes advantage of his being allowed to keep a few milkers, to claim an interest in the unbranded ones. The result is almost always the same. A few dashing, reckless, unprincipled horsemen, lured by his strong waters, collect about the house. Moonlight expeditions are organised; a herd of cattle is formed; and the almost penniless publican eventually finds himself in a position to lease land from the Crown and start as a squatter himself. Many different modes of operations are required in this kind of work, and much strategy and fearless horsemanship in the execution of them. This is occasioned by the nocturnal habits of the scrub herds—as they almost invariably remain concealed in their woody strongholds during the day, and only venture into the open after sundown, making good their retreat by earliest dawn. It is therefore a favourite plan amongst the bold scrub-riders to take advantage of the bright moonlight nights, when, shrouded in the misty light, and undistinguishable from the surrounding shadows, they burst on the unsuspecting mob;

then urging their horses through the trees with utter recklessness as to the safety of life or limb, they gallop between their prey and the dark scrubs. The riders understand their work; each one carries out his part, and, from long experience, knows exactly when to shout or to keep still, when to drive the captives on or to round them in a ring. They, on the other hand, are taken by surprise; they are frightened and confused. The start caused by the sudden appearance of the shadowy horsemen, the fear of man, the clattering hoofs, and the suppressed shout, are all against them. A few of the fiercest bulls break away, and are allowed to go; the rest rush forward through the gap purposely left open for them, and are skilfully steered into a herd of quiet cattle which has been stationed at a convenient spot. Once among the couchers, as they are called, it is comparatively easy to bring them home.

Our hero, who was much fascinated with the delights of a cattle-station life, willingly accepted his friend's invitation to join him in the projected expedition. It was still early when they returned home, and the men were waiting. Mounting fresh horses they start for the scrubs. The day was one of those glorious bright days of which nature is so lavish in Australia. The skies were without a cloud, and the air balmy and pleasant, notwithstanding the heat, which had none of that tropical moistness so productive of languor. What an exhilarating effect it has on the spirits! Even the horses feel it. They know quite well that sharp work lies before them, and they step forward to it with pleasure.

All hands are anxious to try their luck with the clean-skins. "The Barham Downs people were out for a whole month lately, and didn't get as many as would pay for the rations used by the party. But what can you expect from a kid-glove super that isn't game to let his horse out at speed on the bush?

We'll show them a dodge this time. It takes us to wipe their eyes."

It is Fitzgerald's intention to intercept the wild mob as they seek cover at earliest dawn. By doing this he will have the whole day before him to take them home; besides which, the moon doesn't answer yet for night work. The party, therefore, carry with them a light blanket apiece, stowed away in the folds of which is each man's supper and breakfast. Hobbles and Jack Shays[1] hang from the saddle-dees. The bush is as full of life as ever. Hark to the ceaseless singing of the cicala! It almost drowns one's voice. How the grasshoppers rise and fly in front of our horses! Wallabies hop swiftly past. Mobs of kangaroos sit watching as the party pass, or bound away, their long thick tails beating heavily on the ground, and acting as a counterpoise to their bodies. Swarms of bright noisy parrots of all sizes dart from one tall tree to another, or play among the branches, sometimes chasing one another, anon hanging head downwards and holding on by one foot, or watching us with their bright eyes, as with saucy mien they sit, their heads on one side, discussing sweet morsels held up in pert little claws.

We pass through timbered country this time—short, sweetly-grassed iron-bark ridges; then over some box-tree flats, and again over more ridges. Here and there red clay mounds, made by the white ant, alternating with the little, conical, inverted, funnel-looking nests of the soldier, meet the eye. Fitzgerald stops suddenly, and points out two emus to John. They are stalking along very quietly, about one hundred and fifty yards away. They resemble ostriches, but are not so large, and the tail droops more. One of the black-boys whistles in a peculiar way. The emus crane their necks and listen. Their curiosity is excited. See,

[1] A tin quart-pot, used for boiling water for tea, and contrived so as to hold within it a tin pint-pot.

they are approaching slowly! They come within about thirty yards, and John can distinguish every point about them, from their black cast-iron-looking legs, to the bare neck and small head, with its bright eye and strong flat beak. One has a white ring of feathers around the throat. How they run! Ah, they have stopped again, and gaze once more! Come along, we have no time to wait. There they go, their feathers rustling like dried grass. Yonder is a native dog. What has he been up to, eh? He sees us, and, standing, looks for a moment. Hey, Ginger! here, boy! That startles him. He takes to his heels, his tail between his legs, looking quietly over his shoulder every minute. Let us ride up and see what he was after. Here it is. Just like him. A dead calf newly born. Its mother must have hidden it here in the long grass. She has gone to slake her feverish thirst at the nearest water, and the cowardly brute has awaited her departure to tear the helpless little innocent to pieces. Fitzgerald swears vengeance; and producing his little bottle of strychnine, he baits the calf in various places. That will settle the murderer, he says, with venomous satisfaction. A quarter of a mile farther on we met the poor mother. She is quite a young heifer. She is running back to the spot where her little treasure lies, mooing tenderly as she hastens along. Her drawn sides and bedraggled coat betray her exhausted condition; but she cannot spare herself, she must hurry back. Poor thing! her heart will be torn with grief when she discovers the fate of her little pet. How faithfully she will watch over the mangled remains for days—yes, even when they are black with ants and flies, and offensive with corruption!

Once more we get into plains and scrubs. A half-grown kangaroo flies past, making for the scrubs with incredible swiftness—and never had he more need. A few feet above his head sails, with black outstretched wings, with fierce relentless beak and talons, a large

eagle-hawk. His consort skims the ground in a parallel line between him and the timbered country. Should their prey once reach cover, they will lose their expected repast. It is now close at hand; the straining animal is almost at it; but, alas! it is already too late. The swoop is made. The talons sink deep in the lustrous eyes, the black pall-like wings are flapping wildly about the gentle head, and the strong remorseless beak sinks deep into the brain. The hunt is over, and now comes the gorge—days of inert repletion and listless torpor—and then another glorious cruise in the bright blue sea of heaven overhead. But Nemesis once more follows on the wake of murder, and the little poison-bottle again prepares a banquet of death for the destroyers.

The plain we are crossing is covered with old tracks. When this old feed was young, it also was a favourite feeding-ground of the scrub mobs. Look at the small paths leading up to the scrub; they are still quite distinct. Now we approach the scrub. It is necessary for us to make our way through a belt of about two miles in depth, so that we may take the clean-skins in rear, without disturbing them, should they be preparing to feed out on the plains. We enter along one of the cattle-tracks, riding one after another. It runs out in a short time, and under Fitzgerald's guidance we make the best of our way. How close the trees grow to one another! It is quite dark overhead. The soil is a decayed vegetable deposit. What an earthy smell! Fallen trees stop the way everywhere; bushes and undergrowth mask the view. How the vines twist round the trees, or hang festooned from the branches! Ferns, mosses, and lichens, with fungi of all sorts, are to be met with on the fallen logs and old stumps. Look at that gigantic bottle-tree! It is small below, then, widening gradually, it contracts at the top. It is something like a huge radish. The inside is soft pulp,

and when very young, can be eaten. Hark! there goes a "wonga-wonga," high up in the topmost branches of that great cedar. How solemnly quiet it is here! It puts one in mind of a Scottish Sabbath. Listen to the bell-bird! Ping, ping, sounds through the last hushed temple of nature. Now one hears the pat-pat-pat of a wallaby. That is the coach-whip bird. There again. Whew-ew-ew-ew-*whit*. How sharply the last note comes! Look at this immense mound! It is a scrub-turkey's nest. Thirty or forty lay their eggs in it. One could hardly imagine they could gather such a huge pile of sticks and earth and leaves. They bury their eggs, and heap up the nest until the laying-time ceases. The moist heap heats and incubates the eggs. The young turkeys spring out of the shell, covered with a thick warm coat, and scratch their way into daylight, strong and able to provide food for themselves.

What numbers of cattle-tracks there are? This place must be swarming with cattle. Look, high up in the branches of that tall tree is a native bear! It sits motionless. It has something the appearance of a solemn old man. How funny his great ears and Roman nose look! He sits on the branch as if it was a chair, holding with hand-like claws the surrounding twigs.

At last they succeeded in making their way out, and emerge on a little creek which runs close by the edge of the scrub. Small plains intersected by strips of scrub lie in front of them. Fitzgerald determines to fix his camp here. They will be near enough to hear the lowing of the cattle during the night, and in a good position for intercepting them at dawn.

Asking John to accompany him, he starts to reconnoitre. The others build a small fire inside the scrub, and turn out their horses. The two scouts ride cautiously along the edge of the scrub for about

a quarter of a mile, keeping well out of sight. A large plain lies before their gaze, but as yet the sole tenants are a few kangaroos. It has been lately burnt, and the tender young grass growing on it shines between them and the great red ball of fire, sinking in the western horizon like a sea of emerald. Down at the far end of the plain a few white and dark spots appear on the edge of the scrub. They were not there a minute ago. Keep your eye fixed on them. Yes, they are cattle; they move, they increase in numbers. It is a mob coming out of the scrub. A bellow is now heard a couple of hundred yards off. Hush! keep still. A heifer makes her appearance, looks around, and feeds slowly and quietly out on to the open burnt feed. A few young cattle follow. Now comes an old cow, with long, black, many-ringed horns, and many a scar on her dingy white skin. Close behind her issues an old bull. He is an ancient warrior. Gracious! what a hump there is on the back of his neck! He is of a dark brindle and yellow colour, with a white face, and curly hair on the broad truculent-looking forehead, on each side of which depends a little loose snaily horn; large yellow circles surround the small savage eyes. Now come a number together. There are some branded ones. Several have Fitzgerald's brand FGD on the near-side rump. They number in all about fifty head. It is quite dark by this time, and the two spies return to the camp, and turn their horses out for the night.

All are anxious to hear the result. Every one speaks in a whisper. Supper is partaken of almost silently. The water the tea is made of tastes of the smell of cattle. Put a sprig of sweet marjoram in the boiling tea—it will improve the flavour. The little fire in the dense thickets, with the dark forms gathered round it, gives one the idea of a robbers' encamp-

At last all hands turn in for a few hours'

sleep. John closes his eyes in vain. He is too excited; he cannot rest. How picturesque the vague undefined forms look in the dim firelight, rolled up in their red blankets!

What a noise the opossums make chattering and squalling up above! Hark! that was a child crying. It startles him: he gets up. Sam is also awake, and, lighting his pipe, sits crouching over the fire with the blanket drawn round him. Again the wailing cry of the child. "What on earth is that?" asks John. "Oh, one of them native bears," says the stockman, carelessly.

Distant bellows come from the plain. In the immediate neighbourhood of the camp the horses are heard feeding as they jump along with difficulty in their shortened hobbles. "Hadn't you better turn in?" suggests Sam. "We've good three hours yet by the Southern Cross." John lies down close to the fire, and is lucky this time.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SPURT AT DAWN — A FAIR HAUL — CUTTING AND BRANDING.

OUR hero slept sweetly, with his head on his saddle; so soundly, indeed, that when awakened he can hardly believe he slept at all. It is still black night, but the air is cold with the dews of morning, and every one is up. A hurried breakfast is hastily eaten, blankets are strapped in front of saddles, and the horses are sought for and saddled in the dark. They shiver with the cold. The morning star has been up some time. The leaves are stirring with the morning breeze.

Now they mount and ride along the edge of the scrub. Presently they come in view of the large plain. It is nearly quite light now. The darkness of night is fast hastening away, and the bright pale dawn pursues it with incredible swiftness. The zodiacal light is beginning to show. Far away at the lower end of the plain a long string of cattle are disappearing within the black line of scrub. Are we to be unlucky after all? No! Hurrah! A mob of about fifty or sixty head appear from behind a patch of scrub in the middle of the plain and make their way at a steady walk towards shelter. They are nearer the long, dense, frowning scrub-line than we are by a good deal. Now is the time. "Come along, boys!" shouts Fitzgerald, as he dashes along at his utmost speed, followed closely by his men, Indian file. What a glorious burst! The cattle see us, and start at a

gallop for the nearest cover. It is an exciting race, winding up with a dead-heat. Horses, men, and cattle plunge into the dark thicket at the same moment, with a noise of crashing branches and smashing saplings, and are instantly lost to view.

John arrives at the scrub as soon as the rest. He is determined to keep up with them. He will not lose sight of the cattle, even if he cannot do much towards getting them. "Way, way!" he shouts. His horse has run him into a clump of lawyer-thorns, and he tears his shirt and his hands and face in getting clear. Never mind—push on. The cattle are smashing everything before them in front, and he can hear the voices of his friends shouting to them and each other. "Heavens!" he nearly got dashed against that tree. "Confound it!" a vine has entangled itself round his neck, and he has to draw his knife and cut it. Now he nearly tumbles over a huge fallen log. "What an infernal place!" "Which way did they go?" Pull up an instant and listen. Not a sound. They must be ahead. "Get along, horse." "Holy St Denis!" he utters, as a long dead sandal-wood stake, with a hard sharp point like a bayonet, drives itself between his saddle-flap and the panel, and, breaking short off, remains there. It is a mercy that it did not enter his horse's chest. "In the name of goodness, where *have* they got to?" "Which is the way out?" Everywhere the scrub looks the same—fallen timber and thick undergrowth, and trees growing close together. The smell of cattle is very strong, as is also the scent of the sweet marjoram, which, growing in vast abundance, has been trodden on and bruised by the hoofs of the hurrying crowd. Listen! there is a whip away behind in the opposite direction. "How did they get there?" Hurrying back, sometimes jogging, sometimes trotting a few yards — stopping here to tear himself through the vines and thorns, lying flat on the saddle there to pass under an overhanging bough—John succeeds

in getting on to a cattle-track, along which he travels a little faster, till at length, to his great joy, he finds himself clear of the scrub—scratched and torn, indeed, but glad to come out with his eyesight intact. A whip is heard faintly ahead, and spurring his horse, he tears over the plain towards the sound. The plain is full of deep melon-holes, and the ground is rotten, and undermined by rats. Should his horse put his foot in the wrong place, it will be a case of smash; but he doesn't care, and at last pulls up beside his companions.

They have succeeded in running out about forty head. Fitzgerald and Tommy the white stockman ride ahead, keeping back the furious crowd as much as possible. A man rides on each wing, allowing plenty of room, and another brings up the rear. It is in vain to think of steadying them just yet. "Just keep them together, and do not close on them." Now they are well away from the scrub. "Round them up if possible, and let them stand a few minutes to breathe." They will not steady. Again they break and dash off. "Keep them back in front." "Use your whips." Gradually they drop into a steadier pace, and at last, with panting chests, lolling-out tongues, and glaring eyes, are driven into a mob of quiet cattle, which are found feeding handy. "Ring them up." "Mix them well with the quiet ones, and let them stand a little."

"How did you manage to get the cattle out of that awful place?" asks John of Fitzgerald, who happened to be next him as they sit, forming a ring around the captives.

"Oh, that was only a belt about half a mile thick," replied the young man. "After getting through that we came upon another plain. We headed them there, and driving them down it, we found an opening through the scrub on to this side."

"How *do* you manage to gallop in that frightful

thicket of trees and logs?" questioned West, with wonder. "I was nearly dragged off a dozen times."

"Practice," said the squatter, laughing. "I thought you would find it a little stiff at first."

Now they move along once more. "Keep them well in the quiet cattle," shouts Fitzgerald. "Round them up every time they seek to break. They'll soon steady."

How delicious is the bright summer morning! The horses' feet are wet as they brush away the shining diamond-like drops of dew in front of them. The men light their pipes, and the little blue clouds of smoke float daintily on the soft breath of the morning. What a fragrance the air is filled with! Now the watershed into the creek is crossed, and the party halt at a camp, while Peter and John go up a neighbouring gully to search for cows with calves to brand. There, among the wattles, almost hidden from sight, is a small mob. The sweet-scented yellow mimosa-blossoms fall like rain as they push their way through the grove, and drive the lazy quiet cattle down towards the large mob. Many cows with unbranded calves are drafted out on the various camps, and they approach the yards with a considerable number. Near home they pass a small mob of horses, amongst which Fitzgerald points out to John an exceedingly handsome and well-bred-looking black colt, saying, rather drily—

"Your guardian's son, Mr Ralf Cosgrove, admired him once very much."

The tone struck the young Englishman as meaning more than the words conveyed, although he could not have conceived that Ralf when a boy had made an unsuccessful attempt to steal the animal. He remembered that on several occasions Fitzgerald had evaded criticising Mr Cosgrove or his son, although he had inquired after Ruth in a kindly and even affectionate manner, and John made up his mind to ask his friend's opinion

about them. However, the hurry and bustle of the mustering caused him to forget his intention. After a good deal of shouting, cracking of whips, and galloping after odd breakaways, the cattle were yarded amid clouds of dust, and all hands betook themselves to supper and bed, it being imperatively necessary that the next day's duties should commence by daybreak. A loud cooey awoke John from dreams of chasing scrub cattle, and turning out hurriedly, he found all hands down at the drafting yards. Blackboys were cooeying to one another instructions as to the carrying down of brands and ropes, and the noise of the imprisoned herd was terrific. Following the example of the rest, John entered the great receiving yard on foot, and assisted in driving the cattle into a lesser yard. This was not accomplished without much shouting, and throwing of sticks. The cattle breaking back in a body once or twice previously to entering, rushed to the far end of the yard, raising dense clouds of dust, through which occasionally could be seen forests of horns, and hundreds of quickly moving feet, or the dim outline of a beast or two. Now and then an infuriated animal would single out and charge down on one of the men, amid a shower of sticks and stones from his fellows—the assailed one meantime making his escape in the best way possible. To assist in this as well as for shade, trees had been left in the centre of the enclosure. At last they draw into the other yard. Once they start there is no stopping them. What a crush! Some of their ribs must crack between the posts. "Stand near the gates and keep them back if possible." "Fill up the yards ahead." "Now put up the heavy rails, and shut all the gates."

Each successive yard up to the pound is full of cattle. Drafting now begins. Three or four are driven into the pound. They are all cows whose calves are to be branded. They are let out into another yard,

through one of the numerous gates in the little pound-yard. This time, four animals take their place. Two are unbranded calves, and are let out into the branding-pen. Of the other two, one is of the same class as the first lot, and is allowed to join them, the fourth is a full-grown scrubber. It is drafted into a different yard, reserved for that description of animal. So the work goes on.

The beasts passing through the pound are then divided according to their various classes. Meantime all hands are busy. Some are filling up out of one yard into another, others keep the cattle from crushing each other in corners. Fitzgerald stands in the lane leading up to the pound, near the gate, with a stout stick in his hands, and regulates admission into it, shouting his orders to the men in charge of the various other gates. His work is by no means a sinecure. The cattle are rushing and crowding. Many of them, more especially the scrubbers, are maddened at being cooped up in the yard, and charge at every one with the greatest ferocity. Now he slams the gate in the faces of a squeezing crowd, that would fill up the little yard entirely, did they enter. A moment afterwards he opens it, and dexterously admits a couple of the proper sort, and shouts out their class, as, jumping on one side, he eludes the desperate charge of an infuriated animal, dealing it in the same moment a couple of rapid blows with his stick. Now he opens the gate once more. Every one is active, and every one is on the look-out. It is surprising how coolly they work among the furious animals. Every now and then, some one makes a couple of strides to the top of the fence, leaving a disappointed enemy below; and at last, after two or three hours' hard work, the calves are all drafted into a yard by themselves. The large scrubbers occupy another. Fitzgerald intends keeping them in one of the large paddocks on the

run, until he can sell them. Their calves will be put in the weaning paddock along with the rest, and in the course of time will forget all their wild habits.

An adjournment is now made for breakfast, after which branding commences. The young stock were in two yards adjoining one another,—that devoted to branding purposes being considerably the smaller; the other served to feed it with calves as required. The branding-pen was half filled by a number of rushing, squeezing, kicking, charging, calves of all ages, from about fifteen months old downwards. The larger unbranded cattle are kept in reserve to be branded at more leisure. Fitzgerald and Sam jump quietly into the yard. The former takes the noose end of a long, thin, but exceedingly strong, green-hide rope, and dexterously lassoes a yearling scrub bull, who, from his colour and general appearance, must be a son of the animal they saw coming out of the scrub the other night. The rope after passing through two or three pulleys is fastened round the barrel of a windlass outside. It tightens. The Micky feels the strain, and gives a great leap.

"Take in the slack there," shouts Fitzgerald. Now comes the tug of war. Straining, roaring, jumping, dashing violently against the rails, the yellow brindled Micky is dragged up, in spite of a determined resistance, to a corner-post of the yard. Meantime Sam has caught the tail in one hand, and with the other lassoes the creature's hind leg, passing the end of the rope at the same moment outside, to a man whose duty it is to hold it. "Pull up there," he shouts. The fore leg is served in the same way. The leg-ropes pass under the lowest rail, and are held outside. The struggling, bellowing animal is now sideways to the fence, its head held close to the corner-post by the head-rope. Sam again seizes

the tail and gives a sudden jerk; the leg-ropes take the creature's legs from under it, and down it comes on its side with a heavy flop. Red-hot brands are now brought from the fire, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the whole affair has been begun and concluded. Another is caught and hauled up at the instant when, jumping up, the first victim rushes with blind rage at his tormentors. The branding-pen is getting particularly lively now. There are three or four Mickies and wild heifers who are determined to have their owner's heart's-blood. "Open the gate there," shouts Fitzgerald. Sam cleverly avoids a sudden charge, and obeying the command, allows a singed and blood-streaming Micky, followed by two or three other raging spirits, to dash past into an adjoining yard, in the seclusion of which, they may safely indulge in any amount of bellicose demonstration. The smaller calves are scruffed,[1] and soon finished, and a fresh batch takes the place of the first detachment. In this manner the whole of the calves are soon got through. The larger clean-skins pass through the same ordeal; but it is a work of more time, not unmixed with serious risk.

All now bear about with them an indisputable testimony of ownership. The cows belonging to the quiet herd are turned free into the bush. Such as have young calves are allowed to take them away with them. Any calves over six months old, however, are kept back for weaning. This causes much grief on both sides. The bereaved mothers hanging about outside make day and night hideous with their bellowing lamentations, answered every now and then by a plaintive chorus from the yard. So passes the day, and preparations are made for a fresh day's work on the morrow. It is, however, necessary that John should return to Cambaranga; so bidding farewell to

[1] Caught by hand.

his kind entertainer, and after promising another visit when possible, he started for home.

How much more self-confident he feels now than when he first landed in Brisbane! He cantered along the road as if he had been accustomed to the surroundings of a bush-life all his days. Half-way to Cambaranga he met the "Bindarobina" stockman on his road back, leading the yellow stallion. He was in high spirits at having brought him so far. A pair of draught-horse winkers kept the animal from observing what occurred around him, and had a considerable effect in cowing his temper; but notwithstanding the unsightliness of the head-gear, his presence was most stately. The simple surcingle and crupper served to set off his finely-shaped proportions in a manner far superior to what any more gorgeous trappings could have done; while the reins, though loosely buckled, kept the noble neck with its waving mane in a superb arch.

"Mind you don't loose the rein off him yet," said John, warningly.

The man, satisfied of his ability to take him home in safety, boastingly remarked that it would take a better horse than "Yellowman" to get away from him. But he hallooed before he was out of the wood; for John learnt, to his great vexation, some days afterwards, that he had not proceeded more than a few miles further on his road, when, falling in with a mob of bush-horses, the yellow steed set to work rearing and pulling on the halter, and in spite of the efforts of the man, who was dragged out of his saddle in the struggle, he succeeded in getting free. All attempts to recapture him proved unavailing.

It may be as well to mention here, that the animal in question has been since then occasionally seen by a stray shepherd or stockman, in some of the most inaccessible parts of the wild broken country between

the Cambaranga and Bindarobina runs. The surcingle and crupper remained buckled on his body long enough to produce an abrasion of the skin,—their places being now indicated by a growth of white hair, producing a remarkable effect. He is invariably attended by a harem of mares, as wild and untamable as himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

CAMBARANGA AGAIN—A WET ADVENTURE—A HOSPITABLE REFUGE.

On his return to Cambaranga, John found that Mr M'Duff had come back from his northern tour, and did not appear over-well pleased that he had taken a holiday in his absence. M'Duff was one of those men who think they never can get enough work out of their subordinates. A hard worker himself, urged on by the stimulus which the immediate prospect of making money usually confers, he required that none of his people should do less than himself. John was kept at work from morning to night; and very often midnight saw him returning from business at one of the far outlying sheep-stations. For these exertions he received no pecuniary return, it being the opinion of Mr M'Duff, as well as of many other proprietors of "Dotheboys Halls" in the colony, that the acquisition of a knowledge of bush-life, or "colonial experience," as it is termed, amply compensated for the arduous labours performed.

On one occasion when he had spent the whole of the morning and forenoon in the saddle, he was requested by Mr M'Duff to count the sheep on a distant station, and return that evening. A dull uninteresting ride brings him to the sheep-station. It is just time to count the flock: they are correct. The rainy season has begun—and the sky is heavily overcast. It will be a black, dark, and possibly very wet night. He

hates the idea of riding home, but he knows that M'Duff makes a point of his returning in order to have him at work early.

This is the black swamp, only seventeen miles distant from home. Still eight miles to go. It is spitting rain as he canters along. It must now be sundown. It will be a frightfully dark night; now it sets in for heavy, settled rain. There will be no moon to illuminate, however opaquely, the heavy, dense clouds. It becomes quite dark. Still he jogs along, looking for the welcome light, longing for the music of the dogs. He feels his horse is crossing deep, sharp gullies,—surely he cannot be on the road. Now he passes a stream of water, and the animal's hoofs crunch the stones and gravel. There is no stream to cross on the road. He gets off and alights in *grass*. He knows now that his horse has left the track. He leads his horse, feeling for the hard smooth road with his feet. Is this it? He takes out his match-box and strikes a light. The sudden glare in the dark causes his nag to throw up his head with a jerk, and all the matches fly out on the ground—not one left. His horse has travelled this road hundreds of times—perhaps he was only taking a short cut. He mounts again, loosens the reins, and makes up his mind to trust entirely to the animal.

On they go slowly. The creature, finding the reins loose, walks away readily, tearing up large mouthfuls of grass. He must evidently have some place in view, he goes so cheerily in one direction. Perhaps he is making back to Cambaranga! How cold it is! Where on earth can he be going to now? He is climbing up steep ascents—so steep that John has to hold on by the mane; now he is descending a slippery, steep bank, and he slides yards. The trees and bushes have been very thick for some time past, and long wet branches drag themselves across John's face and neck.

He is so wet by this time that he makes no effort

to keep himself dry. The ground is streaming with water, and there is a continual sound of swush, swush, in his ears. What a night! Even the native dogs and the curlews have shelter. What would his mother think, were she alive, and did she know of his condition? He is crossing flat country now. The heavy rains have saturated the poor soil,—it is quite rotten, and the horse bogs deeply at every step. Oh, he is down, and struggling violently! John frees himself from the saddle. His feet sink in the soft mud up to the ankle. He extricates the animal, and leads him, bogging heavily, for some time. The mud splashes over his back and head. The country seems to be quite flat: occasionally the ground is hard, and he rides a little; then comes more bogging. He is fairly worn out; and on arriving at the next hard patch he makes up his mind to camp, in spite of the rain. Here is one. He gets off, and ties his steed to a tree. He has no hobbles, but a stirrup-leather answers as well. The ground is two inches under water, but he is so knocked up he cares not. He spreads the saddle-cloth and lies down, with his saddle for a pillow. How his teeth chatter? All around there is heard one continued croak, croak, croak, from the throats of countless frogs. Fatigue nevertheless compels sleep, and when he awakes it is breaking day. Saddling up his shivering horse, he prepares to start, not to Cambaranga now, which he should have reached last night, but towards the overseer's station, whither Mr M'Duff had asked him to follow him that morning. Which way shall he go? The country is a dead level; he cannot tell north from south, east from west. The sky is one vast leaden cloud. He recollects hearing of a vast box-forest between the Betyammo run and this part of the Cambaranga station.

The horse he is riding was bred on it. Now it dawns on him why the brute left the road: he wanted

the Cambaranga and Bindarobina runs. The surcingle and crupper remained buckled on his body long enough to produce an abrasion of the skin,—their places being now indicated by a growth of white hair, producing a remarkable effect. He is invariably attended by a harem of mares, as wild and untamable as himself.

"Tut, tut, tut," responded the black, with a piteous look, shaking his head.

"Cambaranga close up?" inquires West.

"Bail good way."

The same answer is returned as to the distance from the overseer's place. Betyammo is described as "little bit, good way," and Stick-in-the-mud promises to show him on to a track leading there. John, who is faint with hunger, asks his sable friend to procure him some native honey, of which the bush is full.

"Too much big fellow water, bail ply (fly) come up bail pind (find) him," answers the aboriginal, adding, however, the question, "You patter (eat) potchum?"

"Yohi" (yes), said John, rather doubtfully, for he is not sure how his stomach will agree with the strange meat.

"All righ; me look out." He now went from tree to tree examining carefully the bark, and at last, after inspecting a large gum-tree he remarks, curtly, "Potchum sit down." This he seemed to detect by the fact that there were fresher scratches on its trunk, of the kind made by the animals when ascending than descending. The tree was a very large one. Its bark was smooth like glass. Cutting a notch in the bark, and embracing as much of the huge trunk as possible with his arms, the black fellow mounted the height of the step, then standing with his toe in the notch, with his tomahawk he proceeded to cut another, about the height of his waist, which he also ascended, keeping his body flat to the tree. Step by step he gradually rose, looking like a fly walking up a window-pane, until he reached the first fork, nearly forty feet above the ground. A sudden twist enabled him to surmount this difficulty, after which he walked among the branches with the activity of a monkey. Selecting one with a hole in it, he dropped two or three small stones which he had carried up with him down the hollow,

listening intently as they rumbled down the pipe. They all stopped at a particular place. Descending to the spot, Stick-in-the-mud cut into the hollow, and inserting his hand, drew forth a large opossum, its eyes blinking in the daylight.

A few knocks against the tree deprived it of life, and throwing it down, its captor descended, grinning from ear to ear his appreciation of the white fellow's compliments as to his dexterity. Blacks never move without a fire-stick; and soon the opossum, divested of its fur, was roasting on a fire, emitting a most inviting odour under the circumstances. It makes Stick-in-the-mud, who has only lately despatched an immense meal, hungry again; and John has some difficulty in persuading him not to seize the half-roasted creature and bite out a piece.

The black fellow looks astonished; the prohibition is quite against the customs of his race; however, he gives in, contenting himself by throwing the entrails on the fire for a moment, and soon, to his guest's horror, he commenced despatching yards of the scarcely-warmed intestines, at the conclusion of which operation his face presented a sickening spectacle.

Were it not that he is almost fainting with hunger, the Englishman could not touch the black rat-looking animal, roasted in its skin, its tail curled round and round, and its paws drawn up by the heat.

Stick-in-the-mud fancies the delay is caused by ignorance as to the proper method of carving, and once more stretches forth his wet and highly odoriferous fingers towards the "plat." Shuddering, John snatches it away, and dividing it, presents him with half. On tasting his own he finds it by no means to be despised, and even longs for a little more.

Stick-in-the-mud watches him. With the acuteness of his people he had noticed the fastidiousness which characterised the first few mouthfuls, and he roared with laughter as he saw it disappearing. "Cawbawn

potchum boodgeree, bail gammon. Black fellow, cawbawn patter, my word."[1]

They now started for Betyammo. With wonderful instinct the black fellow found his unerring way through the bush. The country was still the same flat forest. No water-course intersected it which could act as a guide; no mountain rose for a landmark. Mile after mile the same interminable box-forest was traversed. Overhead the clouds hung blackly, but with unhesitating confidence the child of the woods walked ahead in the direction which he felt within him to be the right one. Now and then he stopped to ascertain whether or not a bandicoot was in its nest; and once in passing he gave two or three cuts with his tomahawk to a tree, out of which he dragged an immense maggot, which he swallowed with great relish, after politely offering it to John, and laughing heartily at his face of disgust. Now they fall in with a small track, and Stick-in-the-mud halts, saying—

"This one wheelbarrow yan 'long o' Beetyammo[2] intimating at the same time that he himself is a "postman black fellow," travelling on a special mission from one tribe to another, and that his business will not permit him to go any further. Our friend rewarded his guide by giving him a handkerchief which he wore round his neck, and promised a liberal supply of tobacco on his coming to Cambaranga; and setting spurs to his horse, pushed along smartly, striking at last the main road near Betyammo.

Here he overtook Mr Gray, who was returning from a visit to a sheep-station.

Guessing the young fellow's plight, the kind-hearted old gentleman hurried him home, made him drink a couple of glasses of hot grog, and brought him in dry clothes. John West had grown very much since

[1] Literally: "'Possum very good, no gammon. Black fellow plenty eat, my word."

[2] This road goes to Betyammo.

leaving home. He was now nearly six feet high, and a strong, active, muscular fellow. Mr Gray, on the contrary, was short and very stout; and his guest could not help laughing as he surveyed himself in his host's short inexpressibles, the legs of which failed to cover his ankles, and were a world too wide around the waist. A coat to match completed his equipment; and he joined the ladies, who welcomed him with much pleasure, wicked Bessie slily complimenting him on his appearance.

Once more the rain deluges the country, and John congratulates himself upon having met Stick-in-the-mud. As the party are about sitting down to dinner, horses are heard trotting up, and soon a drenched individual, enveloped in a huge oilskin poncho, is standing at the door, shaking hands with Mr Gray. It is our friend Stone. His horses are turned out, his swags brought inside, and in a short time the good-looking, honest, careless fellow joins the party. He is an old acquaintance. He has just come up from Sydney, and he has news for every one.

He describes the cattle at the great Agricultural Show to Mr Gray, and relates with much enthusiasm how the black and yellow colours of "Old Tait" were once more borne to victory by the little Barb; and, for the ladies' benefit, he gives an account of a ball at Government House, and other gay festivities in which he took part.

He describes the appearance and breeding of the latest imported horses and cattle, and the shape of the greatest novelties in fashionable dress. In fact, he is a fund of information and amusement. He is acquainted with the probable price of store wethers in Victoria this coming season; and the gossip of Sydney and Brisbane is at his finger-ends. Moreover, he interests Mr Gray very much by giving him some information about new country. When in Sydney he met some fellows who had been out exploring

lately, and they gave him an account of lands away to the northward which must ultimately be of great value; and he himself has an idea of joining a party which is about to be formed in order to examine and secure some of them.

And in the room at night, which they shared between them, he told John of a small windfall which came to him lately in the shape of a few hundred pounds.

"I'm going to turn over a new leaf," he remarked. "I'll go out with this expedition, take up some country, and either sell it and go out again, or try and get some one to join me in stocking it. I wish you would come too, West," he continued. "You have got some cash. You can easily double it this way, without loss; and you will pick up colonial experience in shifting for yourself far sooner than in working for others."

"I wish I could," said John; "but my money is in my guardian's hands, and I have no command of it."

"That's a pity," returned Stone. "Well, it can't be helped; but just let me give you a bit of advice. Get hold of your money as soon as you can yourself, and stick to it. Remember it is very hard for a gentleman to get along in the bush without capital. As for the labourer, he is a thousand times better off. He lands here, and he is sure of better wages than he could expect at home. His food is found. His expenses are reduced to a minimum. Every step he makes is one in advance. There are openings here for him which do not exist at home. In a couple of years he buys a horse-team; next year he has two. A small farm or a public-house follows as a natural consequence, and he is almost immediately a moneyed man, *provided he does not drink*, which is the rock he splits on too often. I consider that when an intelligent, sober, and hard-working young man lands in this colony, it is as if he had a legacy of £500 put into his pocket at home; but the gentleman's son, without capital and without a profession, is in a far different position. He works

often for less wages. in a highly responsible position, slaving hard to amass sufficient to make a start. He is in charge of valuable herds, and a vast property. He cannot begin in a petty way. His mind revolts from making a commencement as a carrier, or a travelling hawker, or a publican, and associating with the people that kind of work would cause him to live amongst. Should he commence business as a storekeeper even, he is dependent upon favour for custom; he must conciliate the lowest classes often, and always on a digging township. The masses cannot bear to find any man with more refined thoughts or manners than themselves. They will not tolerate independence. It is not enough to give value for money. To succeed, he must slap 'Jack' on the back, and be poked in the ribs in return. He must drink a nobbler with 'Tom,' and be ready to 'shout' for all hands at least once a-day. Nor must he be annoyed if he finds 'Bill' lying on his bed, with his dirty boots, scrutinising his most cherished photographs, and commenting on them in his delightfully brusque, frank style. It is not," continued Stone, "that a man wants to keep himself aloof from a snobbish feeling of superiority, —no sensible fellow would; but at the same time, one likes to be independent, and live among one's equals if possible. That is the reason why you find so many fellows go away down to town and spend their money. It seems so utterly hopeless, that what they can manage to save out of their small screws will ever grow into a sum large enough for them to make a beginning with, in the way they have been used to, that the natural desire for a visit to town after the seclusion of the bush, with its constant hardships, merely affords them an opportunity of spending what they have earned. They know few towns-people. They have no pleasant houses to visit at. They take up their quarters at a hotel frequented by squatters—men in whose society they have lived in the bush, and whose

habits and ways are like their own, but whose purses are longer. They go from one place of amusement to another, longing for the rest of a pleasant home, sighing for the society of well-bred women in vain. Their own homes are like mine, in most cases, away across the water in Old England, and so they get into a fashion of spending their money and their holidays in this manner as a matter of course. There are, however, many who like nothing better; and some young Australians, with happy homes to go to, choose rather to spend their time in a rowdy, fast way, than among their own circle, but three-parts of the bush-fellows would be glad of the chance they throw away. It is jolly enough while one is young, but it can't last for ever, you know, West; so when I dropped into this little thing I put the drag on, rolled up my valise, and took my passage for Brisbane. I was sorry to leave, too. A number of northern men were in Sydney at the time, and came to see me and two or three others, who were cleaned out, off. As we steamed away from the quay, by Jove! I envied them all standing in a body there, shouting and chaffing remarks about 'Old Queensland,' and sending messages to chums up in the bush; and when I thought how they would return to a good dinner at 'The Royal,' or 'Petty's,' or 'The Metropolitan,' and then stroll on to the theatre, and so on, while I had to cut away back to hard work, I almost felt inclined to stay; and indeed, an hour afterwards, as we passed through the Heads, and the old Clarence snorted away northwards through the dirty black night, and over a chopping cross-sea, if I could have returned I believe I would. I don't think," said Stone, ruefully, "anything can be worse than coming out of Sydney Heads on a squally, dismal evening, a little upset after a spell in town. That feeling, however, soon goes off; and as Fortune seems inclined to do the right thing this time, I'll

give her every opportunity before she has time to change her fickle mind."

So saying, he turned over, and was asleep almost immediately, leaving John to ruminate on what he had said with regard to his money, about which he somehow could not help feeling uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LAMBING—SWINDLING A NEW CHUM.

NEXT morning John returned to Cambaranga, leaving Stone, who had accepted Mr Gray's invitation to pass some days there, to spell his horses. In a fortnight's time, however, he passed on his road north, accompanied by a Betyammo blackboy, driving a number of Betyammo horses.

During the night he spent at Cambaranga he acquainted John with the fact that he had, since last seeing him, entered into a partnership with Mr Gray, who had agreed to stock any good country which he might eventually secure, and meanwhile share his expenses, and the profits on all country he might take up and sell.

It must not be thought that during this time John West had forgotten Ruth, his guardian's step-daughter, or his affection for her. He had not long been at Cambaranga when he sought out her mother's grave, and found it a mere mound of earth—forgotten, uncared for. The cows browsed over it, and the rats burrowed into the soft soil. No stone or cross marked the spot where that gentle heart slept peacefully, but a great *currajong* waved its beautiful leaves lovingly as a shelter from the fierce noonday sun and the chill night dews, its perennial greenness emblematically showing forth the eternal life into which the soul of the sleeper had entered.

He asked permission of Mr M'Duff to enclose it

and put it in order, and received from him a rather coarse reply, that he might, if he chose, make a stock-yard round it. His finances were by no means in a flourishing condition, but he gladly expended the greater portion of them in causing a neat fence to be erected around this spot, so dear to the little friendless heart.

One of the men, a mason by trade, had managed to cut a neat headstone from a flat block of sandstone found in the creek, and John very often made a pilgrimage to the place, which recalled the one love-romance of his life.

It surprised him a good deal that, although he had written two or three letters to Ruth, she had never taken any notice of them, and he puzzled his brains often to find out the reason. He had always taken a brotherly care of her, and he knew she liked him. What could be the cause? Mr Cosgrove wrote once or twice, but his letters were harsh and cold—mere exhortations to work. And of work he had enough. Sometimes John had to go out and assist in cutting down trees, and making bough-yards; at others, his assistance was needed in sinking post-holes and putting up fences; or he had to drive bullocks and bring in firewood.

It was perhaps fortunate for John that he learnt these rough experiences while still young; and in a great measure they kept him from dwelling on his lonely lot. His happiest moments at this time were those passed in slumber, when his mind reviewed the most cherished recollections of his more youthful days, and revealed to him again the loved features of his sainted mother, his grave father, and Ruth, with her wavy brown curls, and sweet sad face.

At last lambing-time came round, and he received instructions from Mr M'Duff to join a party of three men who were being sent out to take charge of one of the flocks. Their destination was a distant creek.

The spot selected for a lambing-ground is always chosen with the object of having plenty of green feed for the ewes, so as to produce abundance of milk; but even to John's inexperienced eye this one did not at all look promising. Part of the grass had never been burnt, and the remainder had been set on fire so recently, that it looked like a mere black waste. Surely a better place could have been found than this. If rain fell immediately, the grass would spring; and although at this time of the year the cold would keep it back considerably, still one might manage to get along; but there was no prospect of a change from the bright, cold, sunny weather. A black look-out, indeed, for a good lambing.

If the men grumbled at the wretched pasture, they broke into open mutiny when they saw the condition of the flock they had to attend to, and the want of comforts for themselves and necessary articles for their work. The hurdles which are required to make folds for holding sheep, and small pens to imprison such refractory ewes as will not own and "mother" their young, were few in number and of bad quality. The bark *gunyah* the men lived in was made of poor and rotten bark; and as for the ewes, they were enough in themselves to insure the failure of a lambing, even on plentiful feed.

"Toothless, ragged, old grannies," muttered the hurdle-man.[1]

It is customary to divide a reward of sixpence per head for all lambs reared over 80 per cent of the total number of ewes sent to the lambing, among the men whose exertions have contributed to the result. This sum is in addition to their wages. Besides this, at a lambing where the sheep are fat and the grass abundant, very little trouble is required to make things go smoothly; whereas a bad lambing makes every one

[1] The man who has charge of the young lambs for the first three days after they are dropped.

working at it discontented, listless, and dissatisfied with himself, his mates, the sheep, the grass, and above all, the boss or super, whose the responsibility or loss is.

It certainly did not look like M'Duff's good management sending this large flock (over 1500) to such a wretched spot. John had often heard him speak of the necessity of parting with old sheep. What could he mean by sending them here? A younger flock could stand it better. He was aware that good grass was scarce just then, but it surely was more necessary for these poor creatures to have something to lamb on than stronger ones. The overseer who attended to the wants of the men seemed glad to get away from the desolate spot as soon as he could, and M'Duff never came near it. There was clearly no hope of a percentage, or even of a tolerable lambing, and the men, disheartened and disgusted, took no interest in their work.

Day by day matters grew worse. Lambs were dropped in numbers; but so old, and weak, and hungry were the mothers, that they rather ran seeking food for themselves than "took" to their helpless offspring. Piles of lambs lay around the hurdle-yards each morning dead—with their eyes picked out, often long before death, by the cruel crows, of which, and carrion-hawks, hundreds could be seen sitting on the neighbouring trees. All day long numbers of motherless, deserted, helpless creatures, with tucked-up bodies and humped backs, baa'ed with faint weak voices their desire for a little food. Dead sheep lay everywhere. Not one ewe in a score cared for and nursed its lamb. Those were lucky who recovered the prostration of lambing. They had no love for their young, and no milk to give them if they had. Still lambs kept increasing by hundreds. The men did not know what to do with them. It was a mercy to kill them. There were lambs everywhere, and almost all without

mothers. Lambs in the yard—lambs down at the water-holes—in the bush—in the hut,—everywhere.

It distressed John to see such a loss of property, apart from the misery of the poor, weak, starved mites that cried their little throats so dry, and their mouths so sore, as to be unable to swallow the nourishment which he sometimes procured for them from ewes who had a little milk.

It was impossible to do anything for the whole body, yet he could not sit with his hands folded; and many were the different plans which, under the guidance of the experienced old shepherd, he adopted. He made little pens of hurdles, into which any ewe that showed signs of having milk, and that would not fondle her lamb, was put with it—both being marked with raddle in a similar way, in order that they might be detected easily in the crowd, when allowed to feed, and imprisoned again—until at length the mother got, by very force of habit, to love her young. Others, whose lambs had died, were penned up and respectively accommodated with a motherless one, on whose back was fastened the skin of its foster-mother's deceased little one. In many cases this met with success. Numerous plans were tried, some mothers being coaxed, others cajoled, and others intimidated. Some were kept on purpose to feed the poor little hungry orphans, who had been deserted by their own parents after suckling them for a few days, and who tried their puny utmost to prolong existence.

It was throughout a most painful business. Often during the night John would be awakened by a thin treble baa from some little lost waif, which had fallen asleep during the day, and which, unsought for by its mother, had lain in the bush, unnoticed, by itself. This appeal he never could withstand; and, seeking the homeless solitary one, he would endeavour to assuage its young grief by giving it a drink from one of his penned-up milkers.

At length it was over, and the last ewe had lambed. All the mobs of different aged lambs which had been hitherto kept apart were boxed up together, the sheep were made over to their shepherd, and the men rolled up their swags, and tramped into the head-station to get paid.

The latter part of the lambing had not been so trying as the first half. Rain had fallen, and grass was comparatively plentiful; but the poor condition and age of the mothers had operated fatally against its success. There were about a hundred lambs saved, but over six hundred of the mothers had left their bones to bleach on the fatal spot. It was indeed a bad business, and John was thankful it was over; but he did not care to face the old superintendent with the fatal tally of survivors.

On describing what had occurred, however, Mr M'Duff did not seem to take it very much to heart, merely remarking that John was exceedingly unlucky with his first lambing.

Rather surprised to find his boss in such a gentle mood, the latter added a remark, to the effect that had the sheep been on better pasture the result would have been more favourable.

"It is not likely," returned his superior, "that your sheep are to have the pick of the lambing-places. They are hard enough to find of any sort this year."

"My sheep!" ejaculated the young man, wonderingly.

"Yes, of course, your sheep. You were looking after your own ewes lambing, and you are fortunate in being allowed to keep them on the station at a time when we require all the grass there is for ourselves."

"How did they become mine?" inquired the surprised new chum, bewildered about his new property.

"Become yours! Well, I—I—I——" stammered M'Duff, who, notwithstanding his greed and selfish-

ness, had the grace to feel ashamed of the cheat which, under the direction of his unscrupulous senior, he had unhesitatingly played on the trusting lad. "The fact is, your guardian invested your money in them nearly a year ago, just after last shearing. I've got the receipt somewhere; I'll find it and give it you."

"You do not mean to say that Mr Cosgrove has sold me that flock of ewes which are dying so fast, and paid himself with my money?"

"That is the flock he chose for you, and he cannot help the seasons. He received you on his station; invested your money for you. You have been taught colonial experience" (John laughed bitterly); "and you have had the use of the run for your sheep."

John had not sufficient knowledge of business to understand the nature of the transaction thoroughly, but he knew enough to feel alarmed.

"Will you show me the account against me in the station books?" he said, desperately, as if doubting the evidence of his ears.

He had worked so faithfully—his whole soul had been in doing his duty—that he could not believe so true an adherent and so enthusiastic a servant could have been treated so treacherously.

They proceeded to the little office, and John read against his name, in M'Duff's scrawling characters, a blotted, jumbled-up statement, which gave him to understand that almost immediately after last shearing this flock had become his. The original number (1700) was charged to him at the unusually high figure of 15s. per head. Two hundred had died during the cold, wet season.

John knew too well the enormous number of deaths during lambing, and he found himself now with 900 old ewes and a few lambs, at the mercy of his untrustworthy so-called guardian, or his managing partner, for grass to feed them with. Another glance at the books showed him that, after payment of passage-

money, shepherds' and lambers' wages, there stood but a slender balance in his favour.

He said nothing: his soul was too sorely hurt to say much. Truly he had fallen among thieves; and those who ought to have protected him had made prey of him. Verily M'Duff had known how to get rid of his old ewes with a vengeance.

Mechanically rolling up his receipt for "money received from Mr John West, price of 1700 ewes, aged," he left the office, his breast swelling, more with grief at the base duplicity of the transaction than for the loss of his small fortune, which, as the money never had been in his possession, did not come home so acutely to him as it might have done. That he, who had worked so honestly, whose thoughts and energies day and night were how he might best please the man under whose roof Ruth lived, should have been made the victim of so vile a swindle, so cowardly a deception! Now he understood Stone's hints about getting his money into his own hands. Now he knew the meaning of the sneers which were coupled with the names of many squatters as the proprietors of "Dotheboys Halls."

At last he believed the stories of Australian wool princes, living in England, graciously undertaking the charge of young men of capital who desired learning the art of making a fortune by sheep-farming, in order to be able to charge them an exorbitant premium for the pleasure of acting as a grocer's apprentice in their stores, combined with that of a butcher's boy at their slaughtering-yards, and finally winding up by selling them their surplus stock at prices above just rates. He had heard that the pin-money of some ladies travelling in Europe with their spouses, the lords of cattle on a thousand hills and of flocks innumerable, was derived from this source.

As he lay awake all night on his hard bunk, he passed through a "colonial experience" which opened his eyes wider to the ways of the world than they had

ever been before. He had cherished the hope of rendering himself so useful to his employers as to make it worth their while to retain him in their service, under a salary which, saved with care for years, might, joined to his own little inheritance, make him an independent man,—and now that dream was over. The next feeling was one of bitter anger and hatred to all concerned. He recollected his dislike to Mr Cosgrove, on first seeing him. He remembered the continual drudgery of his life under M'Duff. How differently he had been treated by kind old Mr Gray and his friend Fitzgerald! He would not stay another hour under the roof of the men he hated. He felt inclined to throttle the first of them who came in his way. And he consigned to the depths of eternal punishment Cosgrove, and M'Duff, and the hopeful Ralf, and Ru—— No, not Ruth,—he could not include her. His fierce emotion softened as he thought of her: she was virtually alone like himself; she had none of the cheat's blood in her veins: and then his father's image rose up before him; and the thought of how he had striven to secure the boy's future welfare, and that he should have died, trusting to the assurances of a wolf in sheep's clothing, nearly choked him. A fierce burst of tears relieved his pent heart; and he calmed down, wondering at the violent sobs which shook his frame and the bed he rested on.

He was resolved now—that very morning, as soon as light should come—he would go over and ask Fitzgerald's advice; but whether he advised it or not, he would stay no longer on the Cambaranga run. Sooner would he travel his sheep from one station to another than be under any obligation to his robbers.

Accordingly, avoiding M'Duff, who, to tell the truth, was not very desirous of meeting him, the lad saddled a colt, which he had bought some time before, and rode to Ungahrun, getting there about lunch-time.

Fitzgerald was not in when he arrived; and he had

time to cool down a little before his host came home which he did about sundown.

"Holloa! West, my boy! awfully glad to see you! I've been looking for a visit this good while; but I suppose lamb—— But I say, old fellow," he broke in, concernedly, as he noticed John's twitching features, "what's the matter? eh? anything wrong?"

John stammered out some unintelligible, broken, excited words about M'Duff, old ewes, and Cosgrove. Fitzgerald perceived that something must have been radically wrong to disturb the lad's generally quiet spirit in this fashion; but he could not as yet understand what it was all about. So bringing out some brandy, he made John swallow a large glassful, and then, sitting down beside him, he gradually mastered the details of the affair.

"Just like that fellow Cosgrove. Couldn't have expected anything better from him. As for old M'Duff, he is a tool—a willing tool—and will be used by Cosgrove until he has grown useless, when he will have to pass under the harrow himself. I feared something of this sort before; but having heard that Cosgrove was your guardian, I was inclined to think that he would be manly enough to act fairly by you."

The honest young squatter sympathised deeply with John, more especially as he knew himself how much interest the latter had taken in his employer's service. They talked over the affair that night, and it ended by Fitzgerald's inviting John to bring his sheep over to Ungahrun until they finally made up their minds what to do in the matter.

Gladly did our friend accept the kind offer; and a week afterwards he arrived at Ungahrun with his four-footed property, like a patriarch on a small scale.

Old Mr Gray, whose judgment on matters relating to sheep was very sound, rode over, at Fitzgerald's request, and on examining the little mob, gave his opinion that they were "culls"—that is, sheep drafted

out of other flocks for some fault, or on account of age. They were not a very bad lot, which he put down to the fact that the worst of them had died; and lastly, he thought they might, in the present state of the market, bring five shillings per head, and considered that it would be advisable for John to part with them after shearing, offering him, at the same time, the use of his wool-shed for the purpose.

This view of matters having been also adopted by Fitzgerald, our hero succeeded in getting his old crawlers stripped of their coats, about a couple of months afterwards, by Mr Gray's shearers, in the Betyammo shed, and eventually had the pleasure of parting with them to a buyer who, having sold his station at a high price per head for the sheep on it, was on the look-out for stock at a low figure to increase the purchase-money.

A letter which West wrote to Mr Cosgrove, prompted by Mr Gray, merely drew forth a reply to the effect that all business matters were in the hands of Mr M'Duff, who had been commissioned by him to invest John's capital. This both Mr Gray and Fitzgerald translated into watching the means by which he might, at the most favourable opportunity, appropriate it to the station use. Young West was now offered a home by both of his kind friends; but he decided upon choosing to stay at Ungahrun, having taken a great liking to its open-hearted young master.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE LAND-FEVER—RALF COSGROVE RETURNS TO THE COLONY.

THE next three years of John West's life passed with a rapidity unequalled in his former experience. Trusted and esteemed by his friend Fitzgerald, he set his mind to work on the one great object of making himself useful to his employer, and of fitting himself to play his part in life; and so thoroughly did he succeed, that he soon learnt to manage the station as well as the young squatter himself. He speedily became a good judge of stock, and an excellent bush-rider, if not a first-class rough-rider—for there were few horses he dared not back with a fair chance of remaining in the saddle.

Emigration had in these years immensely increased the population of the colony; and the eager desire to become landowners on the part of all who had saved enough to take advantage of the very liberal terms which the land laws of the country offered, had caused most of the squatters to exercise their pre-emptive privileges largely, and Fitzgerald found himself obliged to sink all his available capital in the purchase of those lands which were his pride and boast, and of which hitherto he had only been a lease-holder. The same reason, and the higher price which wool had maintained so long, caused the eyes of the Queensland squatters, and of those of the still more crowded-out southern colonies, to turn to the great unexplored and unoccupied lands of the far west and north, and explor-

ing parties were being constantly organised and sent out.

Among the explorers none had done better than our old friend Stone. His push and reckless cheery nature, joined to an unusual development of the organ of locality, fitted him especially for the work of a pioneer. It was fortunate for him also that his exploring fell in the comparatively early days of the land-fever. Under the Crown Land Regulations which then existed, it was possible for any one riding over land which had never before been occupied, to obtain a lease of it from the Government on giving a rough description of the boundaries, and paying a trifling rent. This lease was sufficient to secure the tract of land, no matter its extent, against the intrusion and claims of all others; and explorers having taken up much country in this manner, found the sale of some of it to stock-owners in search of "pastures new" a most profitable business.

Stone had been down staying at Betyammo once in the course of the last three years, and during his visit, which lasted several months, had managed to secure the affection of pretty lively Bessie, among other pieces of good fortune. He had again gone out on an expedition towards a river, on whose banks he was under the belief that magnificent country was to be met with, and he intended securing some of it for himself and his future father-in-law, if possible.

John would sometimes ride over with Fitzgerald to Betyammo for a day's amusement, or to spend Christmas; but the other was so much engaged with difficulties about land and his business generally, that his recreation time was limited. Occasionally John would chaff his friend quietly about his feelings towards Phœbe; but it was plain that, much as he liked her and the rest of the Betyammo party, he had never thought seriously of her as a wife. He had clearly never looked down into the depths of that transparent

and pure nature, nor had he the slightest idea that Phœbe regarded him in any other light than that of an old friend,—almost, indeed, a brother,—for, despite his many advantages of person and station, Willie Fitzgerald was not a vain man. Meantime the Cambaranga station had received a temporary addition to its staff.

This was Ralf Cosgrove, the scapegrace son of John's unprincipled guardian, who had at last been sent out by his father to the colony, but who spent more of his time in the congenial atmosphere of fast life in Sydney than in looking after business on the Cambaranga run. Although still little more than a lad, he had been initiated in England into the ways of "flash" society. He had felt it indeed an honour to be on familiar terms with some of those celebrated individuals whose evil fame rested upon an ability to maintain a balance, with one foot on either side the line which divides the square from the cross sections of humanity. He felt pride in clapping the shoulder of Jack Pelham (who was credited with having several times "got at" horses before the race they were entered for came off) and taking a drink with him; and he was on the best of terms with Captain Poole, the notorious billiard-player, whose success had estranged all his old companions.

He gratified his father by picking up a betting intimacy with Lord De-la-Turf and the Hon. Mr Ringbone, the latter of whom speedily managed to ease him of £1000 at one fell swoop, which his father, with many conflicting feelings of anger and pride, paid, and for some months afterwards walked about with the stump of the cheque in his pocket, as a proof of the pluck his boy had exhibited in gambling with a real nobleman.

It was not long, however, before claims of a similar sort showered in on all sides—for Ralf, taking a one-sided view of the case, looked upon all gains as being

exclusively his own, while his debts were as entirely his father's.

The scamp who had been his father's stable-boy, and whom John West had once soundly thrashed, was his most favoured companion. Mr William Cane had long ago discarded his earlier profession as being unworthy of his genius, and had adopted the more congenial one of living on what he could pick up in general, and from Ralf in particular, who was cajoled and sneered at, bullied, and coaxed or flattered, as best suited the purposes of the leader under whose guidance his career in vice had been fostered and furthered. In outward appearance there was much dissimilarity between the two. Ralf, about two or three years the younger, was of the middle size, slight in figure, with sharp features, and a long, prominent chin; his forehead was low, and he wore his straight black hair long. Cane, on the other hand, was stout and broad, rather short, with a thick bullet-neck, a remarkably heavy, lowering expression of countenance, and a square, thick jaw. His manners had acquired a certain amount of flash polish from contact with his betters, but his vulgarity and brutality of speech and mind clung to him like a garment.

As may be imagined, the elder Cosgrove found that this drain on his purse was by no means desirable. In vain, however, he stormed and swore,—the calls became only the more urgent. Debts privately accumulated, to be found out when their magnitude no longer permitted concealment; and at last he decided upon sending his son back to Australia, hoping that station life and new duties would induce him to adopt a more sober style of living.

One of the chief objects which Mr Cosgrove had in view in shipping his son back to his native country was to break the various connections which the young man had formed. And he was so far successful. Even Mr William Cane, who was at that time much im-

mersed in business (having two or three good lays on hand), suffered his patron and dupe to depart unheeded.

Arrived in Sydney, young Cosgrove at once plunged into the same sort of society as that from which he had emerged in the mother country; and he found the capital of New South Wales so much to his taste, that it was not until his money was spent, and further advances from Messrs Bond and Foreclose became necessary, that these gentlemen were able to persuade him of the propriety of paying a visit to his father's station.

At Cambaranga, Ralf did not increase his popularity. He avoided Fitzgerald and John, and sought congenial society in the little township of Yering, where he managed to while away a few days in the company of Mr Dowlan, the sub-inspector of white police stationed there.

Dowlan was an Irishman, rather well set up in figure, but with a coarse vulgar face, and a snobbish, sneaking nature. He fawned on any one who was possessed of money or influence, and felt no more shame in turning his back on those to-day whom he had helped to drain dry yesterday, than he did in filling himself with drink at the expense of any one fool enough to pay for it. Even Ralf soon got sick of his fulsome toadying and constantly repeated yarns, and at last, on the plea of ill-health, once more took his departure for Sydney, where he entered upon a lengthened career of dissipation.

CHAPTER XX.

AN IMPUDENT INTRUDER.

SOME six or eight months after this, on a hot afternoon, several horsemen, with a number of pack-horses, arrived at Cambaranga. They looked like gentlemen, and as Mr M'Duff and Graham were from home, the woman in charge of the cooking department went out to meet the new-comers, and ask them inside. By their dress and inexperienced ways they seemed late arrivals in the colony, and a good deal of fuss and bustle was the immediate result of their unsaddling and unpacking.

People living in the bush get quickly into the habit of forming a very correct idea of the breeding and social status of those applying for hospitality, from outward appearance and manner; and the kitchen-woman soon settled in her own mind that one at least of the strangers did not come up to the mark. His habiliments, &c., were the same as the others', though perhaps a trifle more *outré;* still she was accustomed to such variety of style, that her attention was more attracted by his contemptuous, overbearing manner. He had remained sitting on his horse, and on seeing her approach, struck an attitude meant to convey an idea of much dignified authority, and asked—

"Hi say, mistress, his M'Duff hin?"

"No, sir," replied the woman, resenting a little the familiar address, "Mr M'Duff is not at home. Who shall I say has called?"

"Never you mind, hold girl; 'ere, take hoff my saddle" (alighting).

"Me take off your saddle!" said the woman, feeling her dignity much hurt. "No, sir; ladies doesn't do sich things in this yer country."

"—— your —— pride! Tell the groom to come hand hunsaddle my 'oss," he continued, marching coolly past her into the house, whence he issued shortly afterwards, and invited the rest of the party to walk in and make themselves at home.

The "haughty stranger" was our former acquaintance, Mr William Cane, who, having been engaged in professional business—which, while it filled his pockets considerably, at the same time imperatively demanded that he should, for a season at least, relieve the mother country of his valuable presence—had turned his attention towards the home of his friend and pupil.

On board ship he had given out that he was the part-owner of a considerable station in the bush,—and the scraps of information which he had picked up from Ralf, and his knowledge of horse-flesh, materially assisted in the lie.

Some of the greenest youths, on their way out to the land of promise, admired and courted this knowing man of the world, and paid for their admiration accordingly—for Mr Cane understood tricks of cards and dice, as well as other descriptions of gambling. He had heard nothing of Ralf since parting with him, but determined to go to Cambaranga on the chance of finding him there, or, at any rate, of getting reliable information as to his whereabouts.

A short stay in Brisbane impressed him with the dignity and importance of the larger squatters. He found that Mr Cosgrove was a considerable personage in the colony, and accordingly his own influence over Ralf induced him to take quite an authoritative interest in the Cambaranga station. There was only a superintendent there, while he was the intimate friend and

tutor of the heir. He had some intentions of managing the place himself. He might perhaps, for convenience' sake, retain the old manager as overseer, but that would depend on circumstances. Such was the general purport and tone of his meditations and conversation to all who would listen. It afforded amusement to those who knew the true state of things; but the boundless arrogance of the man deceived himself as well as some admiring greenhorns. On the whole, he made a considerable sensation, and at last started up country, in company of a few young friends who were *en route* for their various destinations, and who were invited by him to "spell" a few days at Cambaranga. Mixing worldly shrewdness with the most consummate ignorance, blending the grossest vulgarity with a certain experience of manner, something of a coward, yet not without a kind of bull-dog pluck and ferocity, he was by turns admired, laughed at, and feared; but on the whole, as a man of influence in the country, his fellow-travellers regarded him with deference.

No one appearing to unsaddle his horse but an old black gin, who had not as yet mastered the art of undoing a buckle, Mr Cane was forced to do the degrading work of taking off his horse's accoutrements himself, relieving his feelings by swearing volubly at the ancient black female, who kept begging "toombacco" in the most pertinacious manner.

Re-entering the house, and ringing the bell, he demanded that dinner should be prepared; and as the servant banged out of the door, by no means pleased with the liberties taken by the stranger, he called after her—

"Hi say, you, what's yer name? Mother Igh-an-mighty, 'oose 'ouse is that one hover there?"

"If 'ee speaks civil, sir, I'll answer 'ee; but I ain't agoin' to put up with imperence from 'ee or any other pusson, I ain't, and so I just tell 'ee," replied the woman, indignant at being "called out of her proper name."

"Well, don't go hand get yer back hup hover it. Hi'll 'ave a look myself. Hi'm at 'ome 'ere, you know," —and so saying, he marched over to the large house and entered M'Duff's room.

"Ah! 'ere we har', what's this? Hold boy's papers, rubbish; my eye, what a lot of hold 'ats hand 'elmets! I think a 'elmet just suits me" (trying one on and looking at himself in the glass). He then amused himself by tumbling the various simple toilet articles over, snapping the Colt's revolver which lay on the table, and suddenly observing a bath, decided upon indulging in that luxury, which the state of his cuticle rendered highly necessary. With his usual free-and-easy habits, he helped himself to two or three different towels, leaving them lying on the floor when done with, and also coolly exchanged his own tarnished socks for a fresh pair, the soiled articles keeping the used towels company. He next proceeded on a search for liquor, and in one of the toilet drawers came upon a key which opened a small closet in the room containing M'Duff's private store—for, as may be imagined, Mr Cosgrove was not the man to supply any luxuries free of charge to those employed by him. While engaged in this manner, the kitchen-woman came over to see what he was about, and she could hardly believe her eyes when she met the stranger carrying out some bottles from the sacred store—for M'Duff was a perfect autocrat on the place, and his room forbidden to all.

"Doan't 'ee take they bottles, sir," she cried; "they be Mr M'Duff's; he woan't like 'ee touching 'em."

"Now mother Igh-an-mighty, clear out o' this, or maybe you'll get the sack, and M'Duff too. Hi'm agoin' to be master 'ere. Hi'm Mr Cosgrove's friend."

The astonished woman, not being able to do otherwise, therefore allowed the audacious stranger to pass, and he was soon the centre of a thoughtless and boisterous circle.

Just before dark M'Duff rode up. The travellers were gathered in a group outside, and his authoritative manner at once intimated who he was, and even Cane felt a little awe of him. Bronzed, weatherbeaten, and "bearded like the pard," he dismounted from a very noble-looking steed, which he commenced unsaddling, after bidding a cheerful good evening in his gruff voice to the strangers,—for he rather liked the prospect of hearing the news of what was going on down below. Advancing with as dignified an air as he could assume, Mr Cane opened conversation with a remark about the horse,

"Hi say, mister, that's a right 'un. 'As 'e hever *done* hanything?"

Now M'Duff knew quite well that the question referred to his horse's performances on the turf; but taking in the appearance, and measuring the experience of the group at a glance, he pretended innocence, and replied simply, "Oh yes."

"Ah! wot 'ave 'e done?'

"He has carried me for the last ten years," answered the bushman, chuckling, as he bore his saddle past into the harness-room, and then made for his own apartment. Amazed at its condition, he called the female attendant, who volubly described what had happened. Keeping his temper, although much enraged, M'Duff was about returning to his guests, when he once more was accosted by his cool visitor.

"Hi say, mister, perhaps you don't know 'oo hi ham?"

M'Duff now had a shrewd guess, for in several letters the elder Cosgrove had warned him to keep a look-out for his son's acquaintances. Nevertheless, he shook his head, not trusting himself to speak.

"Hi thought has much. Well, hi ham a most peticklar and very hintimate friend of your master's, hand hi hexpex you to show me hevery hattention."

The grim Super's choler was only kept down at this

stage by the bitterness of the surprise with which he meditated overwhelming the self-sufficient snob.

"Oh, indeed, sir; I beg your pardon. You have not given me the honour of your name."

"My name his Cane—Mister Cane."

"Very good, Mister Cane, we'll attend to you," said the Boss, walking over to the bachelor's quarters, followed by the "peticklar friend."

Graham shortly afterwards came in, and was surprised at the comedy which was being enacted before him. A coarse, vulgar-looking, youthful stranger was doing host, entertaining his audience with stories of his intimacy with celebrities of doubtful reputation, and patronising M'Duff, who seemed determined to allow things to take their course.

This strange farce was carried on until bedtime, when M'Duff, whose fierce rage had nearly choked him, got up and proposed to retire. All rose to prepare, with the exception of Cane, who, pouring out another glass of spirits, asked—

"Where ham hi to be disposed?"

"Come here," said M'Duff, gently, and leading him to the door before the company, he pointed to the bright moon and the dusky bush. "There," he said —"there is your candle, and that is your bed."

"What do you mean?" asked the surprised youth.

"I mean this," said M'Duff in determined tones, "that you don't sleep under this roof, and that you had better never show yourself here again, if you don't want to be arrested on a charge of housebreaking."

A scene now ensued, Cane furiously indignant, cursing and swearing, protesting his influence, and at last offering to fight everybody. Every one, however, supported grim old M'Duff, who adhered to his policy of the moon and bush.

"Hi can't sleep there," expostulated at length the mortified and humbled boaster.

"Then you may go to the blacks' camp, where you

will find society to suit you," growled out the ruffled "old man," as he assisted Mr Cane outside.

Whether he passed the night there, or caught his horse and rode away, none of them learnt; but next morning no traces of him were to be found, and considerable amusement resulted from a comparison of his speeches and the real state of the case. Cane found his way down to Sydney, where he was not long in discovering his friend among the associates they both delighted in, and soon the old influence reasserted itself stronger than ever.

Mr Cosgrove, senior, still remained at home. His crafty counsels, together with M'Duff's vigorous management, and a favourable state of the wool market, contributed to keep his affairs in a prosperous state. He had got into a kind of society which he enjoyed —money-making sporting-men, among whom the possession of money and worldly experience gave him a position.

He had never married again. He did not care for domestic life, and his step-daughter Ruth saw but little of him. Nevertheless he was fond of her in a way, and always left some means at her disposal. Perhaps it was the memory of her gentle mother; perhaps the cold, unscrupulous man sometimes felt a sting of remorse when he remembered the bitter agony of that passing spirit leaving behind her the unprotected little one. Whatever it was, he never was unkind to his step-daughter, who would willingly have loved him in return had he given her the opportunity. She had grown exceedingly pretty, and promised a further development of loveliness; but her chief charm lay in her gentle composed manner. Early thought and suffering had much to do in bringing out the better part of her self-reliant nature, and the lady under whose tuition she was placed had skilfully trained that which she found so ready to bend to her will. She had few companions, and the

greater part of her time was occupied with work and reading.

It was a great relief when her step-brother Ralf took his departure for Australia. His irregularities and coarse ways distressed her, and the scenes between him and his father often rendered the house unpleasant. Her thoughts often reverted to the happy hours she had passed with John, but she had never heard anything about him since he left, except through Mr Cosgrove, who had mentioned his safe arrival at the station, and his having heard once or twice from him. After a time he replied to her inquiries rather gruffly, that John had behaved very ungratefully, and had taken his departure from the station. Since then his whereabouts had been hid from her, and she feared to ask her step-father further; but the memory of John's gentle brotherly attention and manly kindness were among her most cherished recollections. She much wondered that he had never written to her. She would have done so herself, but she feared he would think her forward. Yet she was not without hopes of seeing him again; for often when he received reports of his son's unsteadiness, Mr Cosgrove would threaten a return to Australia.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CHAPTER ON EXPLORING.

It has been mentioned that John's old friend, and Bessie's accepted lover, Charley Stone, was absent on a second exploring expedition. The experience and confidence which he had gained during his frontier life had determined him to make the next trip on a less extensive scale than the immediately preceding one, for several reasons. One of these was, that he did not care to go out again under the leadership of the chief who had had command of the former party, and who was also preparing to start; the next and most potent being that he was exceedingly anxious if possible to reach the country he had in view, and secure the pick of it before the rival expedition, which was being fitted out with the express purpose of doing the same, could arrive there.

The previous party, of which Stone had made one, had started from the newly-formed township of Rockhampton, which was then considered the *ultima Thule* of civilisation. There were six members in all, each providing a certain number of horses, and contributing his share towards the purchase of rations sufficient to last them during the period they expected to be away. Two blackboys accompanied them — one being the boy which Stone had taken with him from Betyammo. All were well armed, and a leader was chosen whose orders the rest agreed to obey, under pain of expulsion

from the expedition. It was further agreed upon, that every piece of good pasture-country they came across, suitable for a run, should be examined, and have trees marked upon it, its landmarks noted, and general description written down, in order that leases might be applied for at the Crown Lands Department; and to prevent jealousy, and allow each a fair chance, these pieces of country were to be balloted for on their return journey.

Accordingly they started, the cavalcade consisting of nearly forty horses, of which number about twenty-four were packed with flour, tea, sugar, dried beef, coffee, plums, and currants, &c., &c.; medicines, ammunition, tents, blankets, clothes, and tomahawks, and other necessaries. The leader, with his blackboy, rode some distance ahead, then followed two of the party, after whom were driven the spare and pack horses. The distance travelled each day, until they got quite clear of all civilisation, was about fifteen miles, after which they moved according to the discretion of the leader—sometimes remaining camped in one spot for two or three days, while country in the neighbourhood was being examined and marked off; and at others, making a march of ten, or twenty, or even twenty-five miles. Each one was told off for some special duty. For instance, the worst bushman had to undertake the charge of the camp, cook the provisions, and look after the horses, during the absence of the rest on flying excursions. It was especially necessary that this particular charge should be in qualified hands, for the natives were both numerous, and, in some instances, hostile, and made more than one attempt to burn the camp and stores by setting fire to the long grass. The country through which they passed, though here and there good, did not come up to expectation; still they managed to make up in quantity for what was deficient in quality; and the knowledge that a great demand was about to spring up for pasture-lands,

which they believed would cause almost any kind to sell, kept them in good spirits. It was, however, nearly impossible that they could live in familiar intercourse with an almost despotic leader, without having disagreements and causes of complaint. Continual daily annoyances begot pettishness of temper, and there were some who took advantage of a more intimate acquaintance with the chief to shirk the more disagreeable parts of the work and shift it on to others. This Stone especially disliked, and rebelled against; and being in all respects as good, if not a better pilot and bushman than the leader, he became the chief of the opposition in the little wandering community, in which heartburnings and jealousies were as bitterly felt about trifles as they were in greater circles about matters of more importance. It thus happened that whatever Stone advised or proposed, the leader and his backers objected to; and although in point of numbers the party was equally divided, yet the opposite faction, having authority on their side, always carried the day.

When the explorers had been out about four months, and were thinking of returning, in following up a river, the country on whose banks was by no means first-class, they came upon the junction of a large tributary with it, and from the description of dead timber which its waters during previous floods had carried down with them, Stone was of opinion that, by tracing it up for some distance, they might expect to discover better country than they had yet seen. All hands shared in this view; and an attempt to carry it out was decided on, and some progress made.

In a day or two's time the scrub which lined the banks of the river became so thick and dense, that half the party were employed in cutting a track through it for the pack-horses, who often tore off their now greatly diminished loads against the trees. Before long it was evident that the leader was against

further advance, and the arguments which he used had certainly much to recommend them.

The rations were running short, and for some time back the whole party had been on half allowance only. They were a long way out, in a country swarming with natives, owing to which game was both scarce and shy. The season was a most unusually dry one; the grass was withered or burnt by the bush-fires which raged around them; and, most serious of all, the water in the river which they were following up was very scanty, and might fail them altogether.

In vain that Stone pleaded for an advance of three or four more days. The leader was inexorable. Whether convinced that the safety of his expedition depended on a speedy return; or whether, as Stone privately conjectured, he was desirous of getting back to secure for himself and his own friends at a more favourable season the fair land of promise, of the existence of which he was probably convinced, it was hard to say. He had his way, however, and the little band turned their horses' heads homeward. The night before they struck occupied country, they drew lots for the already discovered and marked pieces of country, and Stone found himself remarkably well off.

It now became necessary to proceed at once to Brisbane, and send in the descriptions to the Crown Lands Office, together with an application for licences; and these arrangements having been successfully concluded, most of the adventurers found ready purchasers for them. Among the rest, our friend Stone parted with his share of the spoil, and made his way up to Betyammo with a considerable credit to the joint account of Mr Gray and himself.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHARLEY STONE'S EXPEDITION.

OUR exploring friend stayed with the Grays at Betyammo during the remainder of the season, and the end of the following wet weather found him once more at Rockhampton, arranging matters with the two companions of his former journey, whose confidence he had secured. Rockhampton at that time was, although very small, by no means a dull place of abode. Situated on the banks of the Fitzroy river, and within easy reach of Brisbane and Sydney by steamer, it formed the depot of supplies for the country which was being taken up and stocked all around. It had also been the port for a "diggings" in the neighbourhood, to which false report had lured thousands some time before, and which, turning out a failure, had caused much distress and misery among those who flocked there, depending on what they could extract from the earth. Just now it was swarming with young men belonging to the new stations which had been formed in the neighbourhood, and who had come down to port to see about supplies, or engage teams or men. Others there were who, having been out exploring, and having discovered country, were waiting in town until the Crown Lands Commissioner, who resided there, should have leisure to accompany them back to these wilds, and report upon them for Government information. Many young men had driven mobs of horses overland for sale:

others had travelled up with large herds of cattle, or flocks of sheep, to stock country previously secured, and had, for convenience' sake partly, and partly from ignorance of a more direct route, taken Rockhampton on their way. Crowds of shepherds, stockmen, drovers, bullock-drivers, shearers, bushmen, &c., were spending their hard-won cheques; and swarms of loafers hung about sponging on their more manly brethren. Besides these, the little town had its own complement of Government officials, bankers, merchants, storekeepers, publicans, &c., who were all more or less known among the pioneers. Money was exceedingly plentiful, and business both brisk and sound.

The young men, who for various reasons were doomed to a certain period of enforced idleness, contributed much to the evil notoriety which the youthful city had acquired for rowdyness. Being mostly high-spirited, reckless men, drawn together by a special fitness for undergoing hardship, and surmounting the dangers and difficulties of an outside life, it was to be expected that they should possess an unusual amount of vitality; and consequently the aspect of the town was an exceedingly lively one. Drinking, fighting, practical joking, blowing (that is, talking loudly and boastingly on any and every subject), horse-racing, and gambling at all hours of the day or night without let or hindrance, intermixed with business matters, formed the occupation of the inhabitants; and Stone was not sorry when, his arrangements having been concluded, he slipped away quietly, having managed, as he thought, to keep his destination a secret.

Their journey was of an uneventful character until they reached the spot where they had turned back on the previous expedition, the only break to the general monotony being an accident which happened to one of the little party, and which they had reason to be thankful turned out a slight one. The horse ridden by the gentleman in question, a very fiery and rather

vicious animal, having had the misfortune, in passing through some bushes, to disturb a large nest of wasps which had there founded a colony, became so maddened and ungovernable under the stings of his assailants, that, unable to throw his rider by fair means, he dashed himself furiously to the ground, crushing the unfortunate young man beneath him. Horror seized upon the rest. Rushing up, they succeeded in restoring suspended animation, but it was some time before they ascertained whether or not the thigh-bone was intact. Fortunately this proved to be the case. At such a distance from medical aid, an accident of this nature meant a lingering and painful death. The sufferer, however, was able, after two or three days' rest, to renew the journey on a quieter steed.

Just before reaching the large scrub through which they had been cutting their path, previous to retracing their former steps, they came upon several mobs of natives. It was Stone's endeavour, if possible, to avoid a collision with the aboriginals, and they had therefore frequently to camp without lighting a fire, in order to remain as unobserved as possible. Having one night come upon a little plain surrounded by dense scrub, they ventured on making a small blaze, in the belief that the thick vegetation would prevent the glare of the flames from being observed. Merrily they ate their frugal supper, and all were enjoying the solace of that sweet "soother," the evening pipe, and speculating as to the whereabouts of the other expedition, when Stone's blackboy, who had been gazing fixedly in the distance for some time, suddenly pointed to a light on the edge of the scrub, about one hundred and fifty yards away, and excitedly asked in a low tone, "Issay, Missa 'Tone, you think that one fire-'tick?" The question—especially coming from the blackboy, experienced in all the ways of his treacherous brethren—naturally caused a start. There was a bright steady little light moving slowly in the direction pointed out, just about

the size of the glowing end of lighted bark, which natives invariably carry by night. Were there blacks about? All knew that some natives have the habit of tracking up their foes at night by the aid of fire-sticks.

Another now joined the first, and the doubt of the travellers was fast merging into certainty, when one of the lights slowly rose in the air and floated upwards, followed at a little distance by the other. Now they sank, and again they rose, chasing each other through the silent night—wandering fires in the "blackness of darkness."

All breathe more freely. The blackboy burst into a laugh. "My word, me been think black fellow come up. What for pireply walk about, gammon you and me like it that?"[1] But the alarms were not yet over. Scarcely half an hour had elapsed, and the tired bushmen were thinking of turning in, when one of the party uttering rapidly the warning, "Look out!" seized his carbine, and dropped on his knees behind a large tree, close to which he had been lying. The effect was magical. In less than a minute each one had done the same, each grasping a weapon. Nothing now could be seen of the little group which, a moment before, were quietly lying and chatting together. The small spot, illumined by the light of the fire, was now empty. Dead silence reigned, amid which could be heard footsteps stealthily approaching. Click, click, click, click, went the hammers of as many carbines. An instant more, and a fitful gleam from the fire has thrown a dim uncertain light on an approaching black figure, discovering its legs, breast, and eyes, with a white mark on the forehead, after the manner of the aboriginals; and in the same moment, Stone, who is nearest, shouts, "Hold on, boys! don't shoot. It's the old mare's black foal!" and so it was. The creature, whose maternal parent was grazing in the vicinity, had (attracted by the fire) approached cau-

[1] Why do the fireflies travel about, deceiving you and me thus?

tiously, sniffing curiously as it advanced; and the start it had occasioned now caused many a hearty laugh from the much-relieved little band, each detailing his own personal feelings during the crisis.

About a week's hard work enabled them to pierce the dense scrub, and the sight which then met their eyes was in itself a sufficient reward for their determination and perseverance. Apparently limitless downs, clothed with the richest grasses and herbs, rolled away before them. A range of noble, curiously-shaped peaks and hills stretched away on their right, while every few miles they crossed running brooks of clear water. They had indeed discovered a land, the existence of which would prove not only a mine of wealth to themselves, but also to the colony at large. Mounting a high hill near their camp, they gazed with enraptured eyes on the far-stretching plains melting away in the distance, until they were lost in the hazy sky-line, crossed by belts of timber and intersected by streams, little knolls crowned with clumps of scrub varying prettily the undulating downs and swelling timbered ridges. How their souls bounded! Oh the glory of being the first white men to tread what might be the future home of thousands of their race! It was a moment worth living for. All was theirs. From the blue mountain-peaks here, where the thin, grey, spiral signal-smoke of the wild man curled away aloft to the far horizon, ay, and for hundreds of miles beyond (for who could predict its limits?)—all was theirs.

Setting to work briskly now, they surveyed roughly the features of the land, and daily became more aware of the importance of their discovery. They appeared to have struck the rich country at its junction with a poorer tract—what seemed also the index of a vast extent of country of a similar character. Several large runs had been measured off in the usual manner, when, as they were proceeding one day to commence on fresh ground, they were astonished to come upon the tracks

of shod horses. There were a large number, evidently being ridden and driven, and going in the direction they had come from. All stopped aghast. It was without doubt an exploring party. On that soft virgin soil no horse's foot had ever before trodden down the succulent grasses. A shower of rain which had fallen here rendered it difficult to determine the precise age of the tracks; but ten days had already elapsed since then, and it was possible that a fortnight or three weeks had passed since they were made. It was not to be supposed that their own tracks could have remained unnoticed, and already their rivals might be straining their horses in the endeavour to reach the settlements, and forward their applications for the country.

It was a great blow to the plucky little company. The direction they came from puzzled them most. When refusing to proceed further during the former expedition, the thought of an easier and more expeditious track into the unseen country must have occurred to their leader. Doubtless he had found it on the other side, and probably was as much surprised to see their tracks as they were to find his. Had they met, they might have made a compromise; but, under existing circumstances, each party's thought must be how to turn matters to their respective advantages. But what was to be done? Hastily returning to camp, a special council was held. Everything depended on getting down before the others. It was true that their rivals had had no time to make such a survey of the country as they had done, but to their experienced leader nothing was easier than to take the bearings of the most remarkable points from some unmistakable spot, and define vaguely the boundaries of runs by compass, which would answer his purpose almost as well. Their hopes of reward hinged upon getting their applications into the office, and marked with the day and hour of their receipt, before the others could

arrive. How was this to be effected? A stern-chase is proverbially a long one, and the members of the other expedition were quite as alive to the necessity for haste as they themselves were. It was maddening to think that they should be deprived of what they had undergone so much to secure.

They could not remain to look for other country. The ration supplies would not admit of a protracted stay; besides which, many different parties were out; and without information as to the routes taken by these, they might only incur a similar mischance.

At last Stone broke silence. "I think," he said, "I know a way to manage—that is, if they have not got too much the start of us."

"What's your idea?" eagerly asked the other two.

"Well," he returned, "down on the sea-coast, straight down from here, there is a Bêche-de-mer fishing-station. I know the men well; they have two or three fast-sailing whale-boats. What I propose is to push down there, and offer a fifty-pound note, or a hundred, if need be, for a passage to Rockhampton, and chance finding a steamer from there. It is our safest plan. I will go with the blackboy. You two can start down overland. I do not think it possible, should they have started, that you can overtake them; still something may occur on the road to delay them; and we must neglect no opportunity. I won't promise," continued he, "that I can get down from the Bêche-de-mer station, for their boats may be absent, or the men may be away on the 'ketch' which they belong to. All I will say is, that if there, for old acquaintance sake and a good cheque, they may be induced to go."

After some deliberation this plan was adopted; and a couple of hours later saw Stone commence his journey. It was by no means an easy task which he had set before himself, and it was fraught with hazard to both him and his boy. He had the knowledge that a Bêche-de-mer fishing-station existed somewhere near the

mouth of a large river, the estuary of which he had observed a considerable time before, during a short cruise which he had made along the coast: but no one knew the country inland; and so many rivers took their rise on the coast-range, that it was quite possible he might follow down the wrong one to the sea-coast, and then get entangled in a labyrinth of salt-water inlets, mangroves, and vine-scrubs. He had only taken one fortnight's rations; but this he intended to spin out by putting himself and his faithful attendant on half-rations, in case the worst should happen.

He must succeed. He shut his eyes resolutely to the dangers which a well-equipped party might escape, but which were magnified a hundred times in his case; and equally cheerful and determined was his companion. Each leading a spare horse, they pushed on until darkness compelled them to stop. Guided partly by compass, and partly by that curious and infallible instinct which some men possess in so very remarkable a degree, they made their way at considerable speed for some days until they arrived at the high coast-range. In doing so, some country was passed over which, with an explorer's eye, the white man mentally resolved should be examined on a future occasion; at present, time did not permit.

From the range, the sight of the hazy sea, at a distance of seventy or eighty miles, cheered them; and Stone fancied that he recognised the towering peak of an island near their destination.

After descending the coast side of the range, the grass became longer—reaching, indeed, sometimes over their heads on horseback. It was armed with a barbed seed nearly half an inch in length. These grass-seeds, being ripe, adhered in such profusion to their persons that they felt like immense porcupines; and the seeds working into the flesh in a thousand directions, also caused acute pain and irritation. The great size of the seeds enabled them to extract them more easily than

the smaller and infinitely more troublesome kinds which grew inland; but nevertheless the annoyance was extreme. The horses also suffered much in forcing their way through the long wiry grass, which, cutting their fetlock-joints, caused each step to be made in pain.

The tarantula spiders—heavy, fat-bodied, horrid creatures, almost as large as small birds, with legs fully two inches long—spread their webs everywhere between the trees; and, in their haste and preoccupation of mind, the travellers frequently ran into the snare, their heads getting covered with the strong, sticky structure, like a veil. The disgust was enhanced by feeling the hateful architect run swiftly across their faces as he made his escape. Millions of flies and insects of all kinds were sheltered and protected by the long grass. The common fly covered their persons, seemingly enjoying the pleasure of travelling on horseback. Little groups of them buzzed in front of the travellers' eyes, alighting on the corners of them, and renewing their attacks, when driven away, with a pertinacity only to be overcome by death. The well-known blight-fly intimated his unwelcome presence by stinging the blackboy in the eye, the lids of which instantly swelled to the size of a hen's egg, and remained so for the next two or three days, causing intense irritation. Tiny sand-flies swarmed in myriads about the horses' ears, or sat in patches over their bodies, goading them to distraction; and at night the mosquitoes united in one continual hum of joy as they pursued their philanthropical investigations.

Pushing along, they came at last to the banks of a broad river, which, from its size, Stone felt assured must be the one which debouched into the ocean near the spot he was desirous of attaining. The top banks were nearly 100 feet above the level of the water. About half-way between the water and the highest

banks a broad terrace ran, forming a second band. Along the water's edge, noble ti-trees, whose drooping branches swept the stream, formed a fringe, the dark green of their thick foliage being relieved now and then as the white cockatoos flew among their branches, or rose in a vast cloud of spotless purity but with unearthly noise.

The river's bed is full of large sandbanks, upon which alligators may be seen lying motionless with widely distended jaws. Native "companions" and brilliantly plumaged cranes and herons stalk about in the shallow water. Pelicans with huge beaks sail about majestically, surrounded by smaller fry of all sorts. New descriptions of water-fowl are met with here and there. A little distance further on they come to a camp of flying-foxes. The huge trees on both sides of the river are actually black with them. The great bats hang by their hooked wings to every available branch and twig, squealing and quarrelling. The smell is dreadful. The camp extends for a length of three miles. There must be millions upon millions of them. Wild figs grow plentifully, as also do the beautiful plum-trees covered with fruit, and flowering vines twine themselves gracefully round their stems. Sometimes groups of natives are seen fishing in the river. They must be numerous about here. The trees bear the frequent marks of their stone tomahawks, and little beaten paths lead down to the water's edge. They have hitherto, as far as the travellers are aware, evaded being seen by them. They each watch half through the night. The blackboy is invaluable from his cool courage; and on one occasion, when Stone's excited fancy led him to believe that he actually heard the rustling of the grass as the savages stole up, he remarked with a grin, alluding to the clouds of mosquitoes and the naked skins of the aborigines, "Supposing black fellow come, you hear him like it that," slapping his own shoulder at the same

time in the act of killing a mosquito, which from their numbers, he probably did.

They have now to cross the river; and they succeed, after being nearly swallowed up in the treacherous quick-sands, of which it is full. Now they approach the sea, and the cycas-palms so common on the coast-range disappear. The iron-bark and gum trees are mixed with stunted ti-trees, grass-trees, and curious weird-looking pandanus-trees. Impenetrable vine-scrubs line the river-banks at intervals.

Hurrah! a salt-water creek. The travellers rejoice; they feel they are approaching their destination, but still their troubles are not over. The salt-water creeks are numerous. They are slimy gulfs of oozing mud when the tide is out, and alligators lurk in their sluggish depths when in, and crossed they must be. Mangrove-swamps must be got round. The white man is to be pitied who gets lost in one of them. They are the home of alligators, poisonous reptiles, leeches, frogs, and other abominations—a bottomless pit of stinking deep slime, swarming with sand-flies, mosquitoes, centipedes, and scorpions. Now they ride down to the beach, passing by a platform erected on four tall forks, on which lie exposed to the wind and sun the dried remains of some dark warrior, and they eagerly gaze for a sign of the presence of white men.

Some distance down the coast Stone joyfully recognised his island, and they pushed along the sandy beach until evening, when, to their great relief and delight, they found themselves at the fishing-station which it had been their object to reach.

The hardy sailors were no less surprised than glad to welcome their old acquaintance at their out-of-the-way home, and readily agreed to take Stone down in a whale-boat, and allow the boy to remain at their camp with the horses until he could be sent for. They were engaged in smoking a large haul of "tit" fish which they had made on a neighbouring reef. Their

"ketch" was beached high and dry near the camp; and, on the whole, they had very comfortable quarters.

That evening the boat was got ready to start, and long before day broke she had left the hospitable camp far behind her, and was running free before a favouring breeze, with Stone sound asleep (the first time in security for many months), wrapped in a spare sail. A good rest refreshed him greatly, and the invigorating sea-breeze, together with his successful trip, emboldened him to hope for a favourable termination to his enterprise. The whale-boat cut along merrily, never shipping a sea. Oh the mercy of the open ocean breeze, and the companionship of his own people after his late sufferings! The sapphire sea, out of which rose innumerable little fairy islands, some clothed with dark cedars and pines to the water's edge, others mere spots of emerald sward, washed a silver beach-line. Piercing the clear waters, the eye could discern forests of branching coral, through which the fish darted in shoals, or fed motionless on their marine pasture. Now and then a sea-snake is passed, coiled with his head erect on the top of a crested wave; or the fin of a shark is seen as it cruises after its prey; or a little bark-canoe darts from one island to another, and is lost to view among its verdure.

But what pen can describe the glorious beauty of evening, when the setting sun, amid a blaze of gold and purple, dipped beneath the waters of the Pacific, gilding far and wide the glowing sea and the dark mountain-tops? or the tropical beauty of the night, its stillness unbroken only by the roar of the fire-flashing breakers as they boomed on the sunken coral-ledges, or rolled in waves of light towards that unknown shore? They had a capital run; and as they approach the entrance of the Fitzroy, the black smoke of a steamer making her way down from the flats is seen above the trees. This is indeed a piece of luck. It is the Australian Steam Navigation Company's

steamer the Boomerang, bound south. Another half-hour, and it would have been too late for another week. She stops; and as the whale-boat runs alongside and lowers her sail, Stone, who is in the stern-sheets, recognises many a familiar face and voice among the throng who lean over her side looking down on them.

His own rough appearance for a time protects his identity. His hair and beard have grown long, the wide brim of his soft felt hat has lost its stiffening, and hangs limply on his shoulders; his shirt and trousers have become of no particular hue, and bear the mark of many a thorny struggle; while his revolver, carbine, and red blanket impart a picturesqueness not uncommon in these parts.

Bidding a hearty good-bye to his friends in need, and handing them a handsome cheque, he climbed up the ladder. The little whale-boat filled her sail and stood away for Rockhampton, where her crew will yet be in time to get a skinful of grog before night.

Once on board he is surrounded by friends. Naturally he is asked whence he comes from; and he has barely given a vague account of his journey, when he is informed of the wonderful discovery which has been made by his rivals, whose party was about arriving when the steamer left. His hopes, so bright a while ago, sink. He asks why none of them are on board, and is informed that the mail-man to the few stations on the other side of Rockhampton has brought in the news, having out-travelled the explorers.

He breathes once more. No doubt their applications are with the mail the vessel carries. Should he present his own before the delivery of the steamer's letters, the victory will yet be his. A friend supplied him with the necessary outfit; and when the old Boomerang makes fast to the Australian Steam Navigation Company's wharf on the Brisbane river, he hurries off to the Crown Lands Office, which is fortunately open, and, presenting the papers which he

has had time to make out on board, has the satisfaction of learning that no other applications for country have arrived from that quarter.

He has gained the day. Hurrah! Nothing like push. Back to the steamer. Champagne all round. He tells his story. Hurrah for the north! More champagne. Away up to "Braysher's" now. What a huge town Brisbane looks after the wild, solitary bush! It is a kind of London. One can never tire of walking up and down Queen Street watching one's fellow-creatures, and staring at the shops. The sight of so many human beings causes a wild excitement, heightened at night when the lamps blaze and glitter. It is not altogether to be wondered at that the "bushman" should commit excess after his silent life of rigorous self-denial and privation.

How strange is the feeling of walking up-stairs and viewing one's figure in a pier-glass! How glorious is the return to a land of plenty—a land of fresh vegetables and properly cooked food! One looks upon the black-coated waiter with a kind of respectful awe, and feels quite thankful when he quietly pockets his tip without upbraiding one with an attempt to purchase his sympathies. The dark, bronzed face, and the rough hands, mark one out to the store-keepers and other leeches as proper prey: but never mind; what's the odds? It is not every day one sees a town.

Every bushman has experienced these feelings on his return to civilisation after a long absence, and so also did Stone, his delight being much increased by his triumph. He had, however, a stronger attraction at Betyammo, whither he hastened as soon as possible.

The following mail took back the welcome intimation to his companions, one of whom returned to the Bêche-de-mer station and brought home overland the horses and boy, whose arrival was hailed with much rejoicing by his tribe, and with no less cordiality than sincerity by his master.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PREPARING FOR THE YERING MEETING—EMIN BEY—FITZGERALD'S SYDNEY ADVENTURE.

STONE'S stay at Mr Gray's station this time was productive of many results. In the first place, he arranged with his future father-in-law to stock the newly discovered country as soon as possible. His own marriage was to take place in a couple of months' time, and he had promised Bessie a short trip down to Sydney afterwards, to which she looked forward with excited delight. Fitzgerald had also been much oftener at Betyammo since the explorer's return than for some time previously; and on returning to Ungahrun he frequently expatiated on the happiness of the little party at Mr Gray's to John, and sometimes he wondered, musingly, why it was that Phœbe refused all offers of marriage. He thought she was far more suitable for a wife than wild, merry Bessie. He evidently liked riding over to Betyammo very much more than formerly, whatever was the cause.

Stone's description of the country, and of its probable future value, had weighed so strongly with Fitzgerald, that, on his representations, his father had bought a run from one of the explorer's companions. This, while it adjoined the fine downs country belonging to Mr Gray and Stone, was, he thought, although of a poorer character, more suited as a cattle-station, from its being timbered and better watered; and it was proposed that John should go up in charge of the

cattle to stock it, as a managing partner. The money saved from the wreck which Cosgrove and M'Duff had made of his inheritance, together with his salary since he joined Fitzgerald, formed part of the investing money, and his kind friends gave him liberal terms, and plenty of time to pay off the rest. This was too good an offer to be neglected; and the belief that the station would soon double its value, with the rapidly increasing population of the colony, once more restored his fervent hopes of success in life.

All went merrily, therefore, after Stone's return. Sometimes some of the girls of the neighbourhood, of whom there were not many, would gather at Betyammo, around the bride-elect, excitedly interested in the coming event; and then it curiously happened that a number of gentlemen found that business of importance called them there also, and picnics, junketings of all kinds, and riding parties, were the inevitable consequences.

Great doings were looked forward to at the forthcoming races. The little township of Yering was the headquarters of a very well supported racing club, and the squatters and landowners round about had much pride in boasting that the liberal prizes offered at their meeting had the effect of attracting first-class cracks from Randwick and Homebush.[1] At the race-ball, which took place there, all the beauty of the district delighted to meet, and it was arranged that this should be Bessie's last public appearance before her marriage. The Ungahrun people had also much interest in the coming struggle.

Fitzgerald had long had a notion that his black horse was possessed of a great turn of speed, and John had determined to test his merits thoroughly. With this view he had entered him for the Yering Cup, and another race or two to be contested for at the same time.

The meeting was fast approaching, and every morn-

[1] Noted race-courses in New South Wales.

ing at earliest dawn John might be seen with his enthusiastic assistant Tommy, as they gave the animal his morning gallop on a nice level bit of plain just outside the paddock.

"Emin Bey"—for so John had christened him, after one of his heroes, the bold Mameluke, who leaped his charger over the blood-stained walls of the Cairo citadel to the dizzy plain below—was really a noble creature. His head showed, in the deep cheek, wide forehead and throat, full soft eye, long delicate ears, and general leanness, the unmistakable traces of his sire's Eastern origin. Long-bodied but short-backed, with round, well-sprung barrel and powerful hind-quarters, the veins standing out like network on his shiny satin-like skin, his appearance justified their faith in him. He was perhaps a trifle loose in the couplings, but that, at any rate, was no bar to his travelling qualities; and a glance at the muscular fore-arms, short clean cannon-bones, broad flat hocks, and long lathy yet iron-sinewed pasterns, assured them that the freedom from work which he had hitherto enjoyed, had materially assisted in developing those powers on which rested their hopes.

Watch him as he stands there, trembling all over with excitement, every nerve quivering; the beautiful creature knows that in another instant he will be eating up the morning air as he tears his lightning path through it.

Tommy mounts lightly, for John has grown much too heavy. Off! away he flies! see how the supple back curves with every stride! He is like a huge greyhound. Here he comes! John times him as he arrives. If he does equally well on Yering course, it will take a good horse to beat him.

Ralf Corgrove has also an interest in the Yering meeting this year of no common order. His demands upon Messrs Bond and Foreclose during the last two years had been so heavy, that his infuriated father

had peremptorily forbidden them to advance one shilling more, and Ralf's affairs looked desperate. Surrounded on all sides by men who understood the art of plucking, in its nicest sense, he could not exist without money. Once that failed, his importance went with it—for Ralf, with all the will in the world, was not possessed of sufficient skill to turn hawk himself. He owed money everywhere. Creditors began to dun him, and at last, at the instigation of his evil genius Cane, he drew a cheque on the station agents, which he signed in imitation of M'Duff's crooked, twig-like characters. It was a capital imitation, and so easy,—the two young men roared at the perfect resemblance. Ralf found no difficulty in writing off one after another of them, and it answered well, for Messrs Bond and Foreclose paid them without scruple. Once more afloat, his usual recklessness returned, until the breakdown of the favourite on Randwick again upset his equilibrium.

He and Cane had some time previously purchased between them a well-known Sydney horse, whose performances, although a shade too slow to secure him first-class honours on the metropolitan turf, were nevertheless considerably better than those of any horse he might expect to contend against at an up-country meeting, and the animal had been bought chiefly with the view of entering him for the coming Yering races.

Ralf was well acquainted with the capabilities of the various horses in the district; indeed there was only one to fear,—a horse belonging to the Bindarobina station, brought out and raced at the expense of the shareholders in that concern by its aristocratic superintendent.

Cosgrove's affairs were so desperate now that a desperate effort was required to set them straight. To meet the Randwick losses Ralf had been again

necessitated to use M'Duff's name — this time to a set of bills which his creditors held in security—the first of them being due a short time after the Yering meeting. Accordingly they resolved to risk all upon the success of their horse.

He couldn't fail. They would take every precaution. The Yering people knew nothing of the thousand and one dodges of the great courses, and Cane and he had not served a good apprenticeship to the craft without as yet profiting by it.

The affairs of the former worthy were quite as desperate as those of his patron. His brutal, domineering vulgarity had made him hated by those whose interests it had formerly been to cultivate his company. Insolent and overbearing, his own proper "crowd" detested him. During the last twelvemonths he had given himself greatly up to drink, which had by no means improved him; and although he had made a cat's-paw of his friend in the matter of forgery, he would not have hesitated in entering upon any desperate attempt to possess himself of funds.

It was at this stage of their history that they started up to Brisbane, and thence made their way to Yering township, with their confidential following of "jock" and stable-helps. Here they took up their residence for the time being, much courted and flattered by Mr Sub-Inspector Dowlan, who felt it quite an honour to walk about with such well-known turfites, and whose cordial sympathy and co-operation they had bought, by taking him, to a certain extent, into their counsels. To his disparaging shrugging of the shoulders and contemptuous nodding of the head they were obliged for much long odds laid against their horse by the confiding sheep and cattle men of the district, who all "knew Dowlan." He was a real good fellow, and would give them the straight tip. He managed, however, to back the Sydney crack quietly, right and left; and as the Bindarobina

horse was the favourite of the district, he found not a few takers.

About a fortnight before the races came off, Fitzgerald was called to Sydney to confer on urgent business with his father. It was rather annoying to miss the fun which all looked forward to at Bessie's wedding, and he had also grown much interested in the success of his horse; but it could not be helped. The days spent in Sydney were to him a very weariness of the flesh. He had no sympathies in common with the office and general pen-and-ink style of men who swarm in every city, and there were but few bushmen in town at this time of the year.

His father and mother occupied a beautiful residence at Pott's Point, looking out on the sea. A charming garden, laid out in terraces decorated with statues, fountains, and shady bowers, ran down to a snug little yacht anchorage, in which a trim, rakish-looking cutter, with an immense tapering mast, rode securely at anchor, — for Mr Fitzgerald, senior, although stiff and well up in years, still retained that love of outdoor amusements which had ever characterised him.

From the marble-pillared verandah on one side a full view could be had of the harbour right up to the head; and it was a glorious sight, when blowing fresh, to watch the white horses rearing their watery crests as they charged madly into the very heart of the city. On the other side of the house a not less beautiful scene met the gaze. The broad expanse of "Wooloomooloo Bay" ran into the town in the shape of a crescent, of which Pott's Point and another beautiful promontory formed the horns; while still further over lay another yet more lovely little cove, surrounded by the enchanting Botanical Gardens and the pleasure-grounds, from amid which the castellated towers of Government House looked down upon Garden Island, the little island-tower of Fort Denison, and the men-

of-war at anchor. On the opposite side of the harbour could be seen the north shore, dotted with handsome villas and gardens, Neutral Bay, and the dark-timbered eminences stretching away towards Middle Harbour. Hundreds of ships lay at anchor; steamers came and went; yachts glided, fairy-like, in and out of the most beautiful nooks, or tacked about with their freight of pleasure-seekers; and a multitude of smaller craft covered the water.

Any man might have enjoyed a stay in such a home, fitted with every comfort, and encircled by troops of friends, but Willie Fitzgerald's tastes did not lie that way. He would not have exchanged one hour of the free, healthy, bush-life for a month of Sydney's delights and dissipations. Obliged by business to stay a certain period in town, he found time hang very heavy on his hands. He wandered into his club and read the papers listlessly, and wandered out again. Sometimes he would stroll along George Street to the "Royal," in the hope of catching a stray bushman down on business like himself, but at this time of year the city was always bare of that lively class. He had, in desperation, commenced a flirtation with one of the fascinating damsels belonging to the bar of that much-frequented establishment, when a trivial event completely changed his thoughts, and gave a new impetus to his existence.

Calling late in the afternoon to pay a farewell visit at the house of a gentleman, with whom, in the course of his business, he had become acquainted, he was shown into a large and tastefully furnished drawing-room. The chairs, ottomans, and sofas, &c., as well as the window-hangings, were in amber satin. The floor was of inlaid Zürich wood tiles, of particularly fine manufacture, and arranged in carefully chosen colours. Articles of *virtu* of all kinds, Parian marble statues, ormolu clocks, antique vases, ivory carvings, Chinese embroidery, old china, and a thousand and one

expensive and useless articles of the Western and Eastern worlds, lay scattered about. An immense window, looking out upon the sheltered cove and the Botanical Gardens, occupied nearly all of one side of the room, the beautiful view being reproduced in huge mirrors, skilfully arranged with that design on the opposite side. Large plate-glass folding-doors led into a spacious and elegantly-fitted-up conservatory, on the third side, the pillared supporters of its roof being twined round with graceful and rare creepers. This tropical display of broad-leafed plants and glorious flowering creepers and shrubs was also made by an ingenious adjustment of mirrors to multiply its beauties. A few choice landscapes, in oil and water colours, adorned here and there the harmoniously papered walls, while the ceiling was toned and decorated to match the rest of the apartment.

As Fitzgerald entered, his eye fell upon the figure of a lady standing near the window, gazing upon the calm glassy sea and dark Norfolk pines of the gardens. The flood of evening sunset bathed her figure in light, and, reflected by the mirrored walls, caused the room to shine in a perfect blaze of warm golden light. So deep had been her preoccupation of mind that she did not hear the announcement of his name, and continued her meditations. As Fitzgerald approached he became aware that she was much younger than the lady he had called upon, although her back was as yet turned to him. The figure, though not exactly tall, carried with it an idea of height. The form was exceedingly graceful; and the attitude of pensive thought, as she leant slightly upon a marble pillar of the window, contrasted strongly, as did her dark, quiet dress, with the gorgeous richness of her surroundings.

A premonitory hem from Fitzgerald drew her attention towards him, and as she turned round her great beauty became apparent. The contour of the head was of a purely Grecian type. Large masses of brown hair

were done up simply, and formed a great shining knot behind. Her eyes were full and large, and rather oblong, the soft brown pupils relieved by the china-like purity of the white. A delicate bewitching nose, and a pair of arch lips, which ceaselessly formed themselves into those enchanting curves, so common in childhood and so rare in after-life, together with rows of little pearly teeth, and a rounded chin in which lurked a roguish dimple, ever and anon appearing to hide itself as quickly, completed an oval face of a loveliness never before observed by the squatter, who stood bewildered.

With perfect self-possession, but quietly, and with a modest, maiden-like grace, the young girl received the stranger, and explained that the lady to whom he was desirous of paying his respects was from home, but would shortly return; and Fitzgerald, more and more struck with the sweet, sad expression of the features, and the composed manner of his entertainer, took advantage of the opportunity to prolong his visit and improve his acquaintance. Her conversation had no less charm for him than her beauty. She spoke of England and its scenery as compared with that of Australia, until Fitzgerald thought it the most delightful place in the world. She praised the beauty of the scene before them, and it instantly acquired tenfold more loveliness than he had noticed in it before. She spoke of Tennyson, and Browning, and Longfellow, and poor Willie Fitzgerald felt himself on unknown ground, and mentally resolved to give up several hours each day to their study. An hour flew past. It was time to go, but he could not wrench himself away. The long dark lashes which fringed the expressive eyes rested on a cheek on which the rich colour, mantling through the dark yet transparent skin, came and went with every emotion. Willie Fitzgerald had discovered a new world in the calm dark depths hidden by those drooping lashes.

The lady not arriving, he was at last obliged, for very shame's sake, to rise and take his departure.

His mind dwelt upon the dark beauty of the young girl he had left. He could not rest. Who was she? What was her name? Why was it that he only met her on the very last day of his stay in town? He had hated Sydney, and longed for his bush home. Now he would have given the world to stay.

What an ass he had been! Invited over and over again to visit the house he had just left, he had put off doing so until the last moment, and had thrown away chance after chance of seeing the being whom of all others he felt he loved most. He had only seen her for an hour. He would think of her no more. He sought out his old haunts, but could find no peace.

The sad quiet face with the expressive eyes haunted him. He returned to the house that night, and several times was on the point of ringing the bell and making a second visit, but felt that they would think it strange in him doing so, and he wound up by walking up and down in front of her window. He had to leave next morning early, and did not even know her name. He started once more into town, and searched among the men at the club for one who could give him information on the subject nearest his heart, but without success for some time.

At last one who had overheard him making inquiries remarked, carelessly, "Oh, you mean that pretty, quiet-looking girl at Mrs Berkeley's? She is, I think, some relative of hers. She is a Miss Bouverie, and has only lately come to Sydney."

That was all he learned about one who had made a stronger impression on him than any one ever had done before; and when next morning he stood on the deck of the steamer gazing at Mrs Berkeley's fast receding mansion, he felt he had left his heart behind him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BUSH HOSPITALITY—THE MAN-TRAP—A DANCE IN A WOOL-SHED—THE RACE-BALL.

WHILE at Yering township, Ralf thought proper to take a run over to Cambaranga, to see old M'Duff, and discover if possible whether or not any intimation of the free use which had been made of his name had as yet reached him.

He found the old superintendent raging. His Sydney letters had that day brought him the intelligence; and so much put out was he about the circumstance, that had it not been for the expected visit of a gold-fields' butcher, who was desirous of buying a large number of fat wethers, he would have started down to town at once.

Ralf's heart quaked when he saw the fearful rage and determined anger of the man who had law on his side. He did not dare to think of what might happen should his plans fail, and his bills be presented and left unpaid. He rejoiced that no suspicion of his guilt had crossed old M'Duff's mind, and he hastened back to Yering, more resolved than ever to effect a success, whatever the cost might be.

About a week before the eventful day, John had sent Emin Bey, under the careful charge of Tommy, to a station within a couple of miles of Yering. It was owned by a jolly, bluff, hearty squatter, with a great taste for field-sports of all kinds. His motherly wife, and a large family of sons and daughters, con-

tributed to keep up the reputation which the hospitable establishment had earned for itself, even in this land of unlimited hospitality; and an invitation had been sent to the Betyammo people, together with those at Ungahrun and Mosquito Creek, begging them to make "Oorgootoolah" their home during the race-week.

The Betyammo station seemed the acknowledged rendezvous of all living in that part of the district; and three days before the festival commenced, a large party, who had mustered there, and who, to tell the truth, had been holding a small carnival of kangaroo-hunting, impromptu racing, dancing, croquet, and picnics (the excuse, of course, being Bessie's approaching wedding), set out on horseback for Oorgootoolah. Mr Gray and his wife, indeed, travelled in the buggy, but the younger members of the joyous band preferred the more exciting mode. Much laughing and amusement whiled the time away. The gentlemen rode their finest steeds, and many a one felt a gush of everlasting gratitude, as the hot or wicked-tempered creature under him gave him an opportunity of displaying before the bright though rather critical eyes of the admiring ladies, the art he especially plumed himself on.

A merry laughing throng, they arrived in a body at Oorgootoolah, where the hearty old squatter, with his stalwart sons and bouncing, fresh, happy-faced daughters, received them heartily.

The house was not a large one, and under ordinary circumstances the family were quite sufficient to fill it; but, "God bless me!" cries the large-hearted squatter, "it's made of elastic. There's room for any amount more." Mr and Mrs Gray are accommodated with a chamber, the daughters run off laughing and whispering with Phœbe, Bessie, and the other girls, to some mysterious quarters in the friendly old house; and the men, after turning their horses into the pad-

dock, carry their saddles and valises into a large store prepared for their reception. There is room here for fifty, rolled up on the floor; and should that fail them, there is no end of other places; or the bush, as a fall back, where, indeed, some of them prefer camping as it is.

John found his horse thriving well under Tommy, who is so careful of him that he will not leave him day or night.

"You see, sir," he explains, "there are no end of loafing vagabonds about that 'ere Yering; who knows but what some of 'em might take it into their heads to get at him?"

"Not much fear of that, Tommy," said John. "Go into the town, my lad, and look about you: the horse is a dark one; no one but ourselves knows anything of what he can do." But Tommy preferred staying with his idol.

"No, no; he wouldn't give any one the chance."

John took a ride in during the course of the day, and found the little place in great excitement. Men from all parts of the district were congregated together, spending money recklessly, and the usual scenes were occurring. He had hardly got off his horse at the door of the hotel, when Dowlan came up to him, in an unusually friendly manner, and offering his hand, winked knowingly. "I say, West" (whispers this in John's ear), "I can put you up to the right thing this time,—give you the straight tip, old man."

John, who detested Dowlan, coolly walked past him. He had learnt to despise the man's venality during the period of his sheep disasters. At that time Dowlan, who, with the district in common, had learnt the story, and who had formerly been a trusted ally of simple-hearted John, had mortally wounded him by cutting him sedulously in public. It was beneath the dignity of the sub-inspector to know a man who "had had losses." He had crawled his way up in "the

foorce" to his present distinguished position from obscurity; he could not tarnish its brightness by any act of disinterestedness. Since John had been taken in hand by Fitzgerald, he had steadily endeavoured to propitiate his goodwill, but ineffectually; and Fitzgerald himself, although not so bitter as our hero, had the lowest opinion of him as a cad.

Pocketing the affront, Dowlan once more approached and obtruded himself upon John, who was standing talking to the two Mosquito Creek squatters, offering to introduce him to Ralf and Cane. "Very intimate friends of mine," he added.

John shook his head. "Don't want to know them, thank you," he said, walking away. It was useless. Dowlan turned his attention to others. His voice, with its rich accent, could be heard among the rest, praising loudly the style and action of the Bindarobina horse, as well as those of the district generally.

Much drinking was going on in the bar parlours, and more in the bars. The little township was afflicted with no less than five large public-houses, two of them devoted to the entertainment of the better classes; the others being patronised by the inferior grades.

Having some business at the far end of the long, straggling street—the only one the place could boast of—he had occasion to pass one of these, the Bushman's Arms, when he heard his name shouted out two or three times in a half-drunken tone, and looking up, he saw his old friend Graham, the Cambaranga overseer, standing on the verandah, which was raised on piles some distance above the ground, swaying unsteadily, with a bottle in one hand and a glass in the other. Two or three dirty-looking fellows were in his company, and the bar looked pretty full of men, more or less under the influence of drink.

Old Graham had long before confided to John his history. It was a common one in Australia. Married to a respectable woman, by whom he had several chil-

dren, some of them by this time nearly grown up, he was compelled to leave a good situation in the vicinity of a large town, owing to the cursed habit of drinking which he had acquired. A loving husband and a kind father when sober, he became a madman when drunk. Once "on the burst," as he phrased it, money, horses, cows, furniture, even his wife's wearing apparel, went to feed the insatiable and cruel demon who possessed him; and his poor wife, after hard struggling, and battling bravely with her shame and misery, had, for her children's sake, to insist upon his departure

Being a first-class sheep-overseer, and when away from liquor a highly trustworthy man, he easily got a situation on a station, where, having no opportunities of gratifying his propensity, he was soon able to remit some money to those whom he dearly loved, yet whose blight the cursed habit had made him. He had essayed several times to pay a visit to his loved ones since his banishment, but in vain. The first public-house he came to proved a man-trap which never failed to ensnare the unhappy man, who spent a wild delirious week of excitement, to awaken to a weakened frame and an agonised paroxysm of remorse, compared with which his other sufferings were as nothing. Moneyless and on foot, with trembling limbs and nerves, gazing fearfully around him at the dreadful forms stealthily tracking him up, or the gibbering faces, mowing and grinning behind every bush and seated on every tree, he would creep back, abased, wrecked, and shorn of his self-esteem, to commence afresh in desperation, develop afresh into good resolutions, strengthen afresh into firm determination, and succumb at last to the devilish wiles of the soul and body destroyers, who neglected no device to lure him into their nets.

Many were the plans formed by poor old Graham to elude his tempters and succeed in reaching a

town. Having, after steady laborious work, once more amassed a good round sum, he would again plan his hitherto unaccomplished home journey. He would travel through the bush. He would not go along the road. He would not even suffer his eyes to rest on the building containing the liquor which exercised its fearful influence so terribly. Night and day, as the hour of his departure drew nearer, he would scheme and plot. He yearned for home. He purchased his presents for the dear ones over and over again in thought. He even contemplated remaining with them altogether—for, indeed, if he could resist these public-houses on his way down, might he not fairly claim to be reformed? And yet, when the day of settlement came, he would indignantly reject the offer of a cheque payable only in Sydney, where his family lived. That was an insult to him. He could surely take care of the money himself. He wanted to buy some things on the road. Already he felt excited as he prepared for his start. Already his stomach began to burn and gnaw. Already the evil spirit dwelling in that swept and garnished habitation has roused up his seven sleeping brethren, more cunning and devilishly malicious than himself, and who, rushing to their respective posts, stir the senses with insidious suggestions and imaginings. And the great fiend, their master, seizing the opportunity, would (inciting another willing slave by the equally accursed love of money) cause him to employ one of the many devices of which, alas! his poor victim was not even ignorant, so barefaced were they, to upset the firmly formed resolutions, and drag him once more, capering in senile folly, to the mouth of the yawning pit.

Managing to keep himself well informed as to the state of old Graham's finances, the publican in the neighbourhood would time it exactly that business required his presence in the vicinity. A few pleasant

stories, and a drink or two out of the fatal bottle, invariably carried, proved sufficient — the bird was snared; the taste was in his mouth; he was booked. Or he would profess an anxiety to see him, in order that he might settle an account which left some trifling balance to the lost one's credit; or he would give a long price for a horse; or it was some miserable shallow pretext, through the flimsiness of which the unfortunate man could plainly detect the hellish dangers below, and yet which proved strong enough to cage his soul in iron bands.

Thus it ever happened to the poor old man. This time he had exercised a rigorous self-restraint. John had much compassion for him, and supported him to the utmost during his stay at Cambaranga; and old Graham even now, although no longer much in his company, looked upon him as a helper and adviser.

He had been his confidant in this last great effort. For two years the old man had carefully saved. Not a drop of the poison had during that period gone over his lips, and John actually believed that age had weakened the disease.

He was aware that the old overseer intended making a visit to his family, and he earnestly begged him to allow him to forward his savings, which amounted to nearly two hundred pounds (for Graham was enabled, by shrewd bargaining in horse-flesh, and strict economy, to amass yearly a large sum), to Sydney through the bank,—but no. The old fellow was obstinate on that point; he would put the money himself into his wife's hands, and telling her how he had borne it with him through the manifold temptations of the journey, he would beg her forgiveness with humility.

Accordingly he started, and the reader may imagine the pang it cost our hero when his eye fell on the reeling form of the old man, hiccupping out gleefully in his drunken idiocy, over and over the same two lines of a senseless ballad, his grey beard and shirt-front

alike stained and wet with the deleterious compound spilt by his trembling hands.

John jumped on the verandah. Perhaps he thought he might find some one among the crowd who would take the old fellow away. He was well known and very popular in the district, and was instantly assailed by a dozen different individuals, all clamorous to have a drink along with him.

"What are you going to drink, Mr West?"

"Come along, Mr West," another shouted; "I'm a-goin' to shout; what's yours?"

A third inebriated, long-legged, stockman-looking fellow, in boots and breeches, his cabbage-tree hat hanging far back on his head, lurched up, and with maudlin fun in his watery eyes, asked—

"Izay, yunkplo', avyou washyoneck jishmorn?"

John, who had much tact and good-humour when managing men under all circumstances, and never stood on his dignity foolishly, returned laughingly, feeling the part in question—

"I believe I have. Does it look particularly dirty?"

"Not s'hout'shide, yunkplo'; 'shin'shide, I meant. Comenave a b-b-b-ball."

Our hero was not a teetotaller, although a disapprover of the vice of drinking, and the men knew it. He was aware that most of them take a refusal as a direct personal insult; and accordingly, on the principle of doing in Rome as the Romans do, he agreed. "Drinks all round" are ordered for those in the room.

At the well-known sound, the two or three drunken dirty brutes surrounding old Graham came staggering in.

One of them shouting, "Belly up, boys! I'm in for this good thing," made his way to the bar to be served along with the rest, when the shouter, who was an excellent manly fellow, although unhappily given to drink, and who despised all such loafers, roared out—

"Clearout 'shish yo —— sneaking, loafing dead-

heads! Cantyoget'nuff oushat poo ole —— oushi?" Then turning to the barman he said, warningly, "Doncgo sherv nono shem spungin shentemin wimy-money, I shust warnyo."

The drink was scarcely down his throat when another rather bumptious and over-familiar style of man staggered up, pretending to be more drunk than he really was. "Issay, young un," he said (laying his dirty paws upon John), "will y'ave drink along o' me?"

John refused repeatedly. He didn't like the man or his impudent manner, and turned his back on him.

"You ——, you're too —— proud to drink with a poor man," shouted the enraged ruffian.

John, who was watching a drunken horseman forcing his steed up the steps on to the wooden verandah, on which the hoofs sounded like thunder, took no notice; but one of the crowd, turning roughly on the coarse blackguard, threatened to stuff his fist down his throat, and managed to quieten him, upon which he came up begging John's pardon, and entreating him once more to have a drink, which John once more refused.

All classes of labouring men crowded the building, singing and talking.

A small party of Cambaranga shepherds near John were discussing the merits of their dogs, and one of them had almost succeeded in silencing the rest, when an old grey-headed "superintendent of grass-cutters" an "old hand," broke in—

"Look hyar, matey. I don't call that 'ere dog o' yourn anything out o' the common, you know. Now I had a dog as was a dog. I had to take a small lot o' sheep once from Jeeburrina on the Darling, about three hundred miles away to another station, all by myself, you know, and I had the dog with me. Well, when I got within a hundred miles o' home, I goes on ahead, and by-and-by the dog brings home the monkeys. Well, mates, I counts 'em. There was two short. 'Spanker,'

says I, 'where is the odd two, old man?' He looks at me and wags his blessed old tail, and away he slithers. In a day or two he comes back with a couple of sheepskins. *The beggar had killed them on the road for rations, and brought the skins to show it was all regular fair and square.*"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the crowd. "Good for you, Yorkey."

"Have another drink, boys," says the chuckling old hand.

Old Graham had meantime staggered into the room, and was vainly essaying to string a few words together consecutively, but the paralysed brain and swollen tongue refused their duty. He was quite aware of John's identity; but beyond that his reason refused to carry him.

Observing among the crowd one whom he knew to be a sober man, comparatively speaking, John drew him on one side, and asked if he could manage to get the overseer away, promising to reward him liberally.

"It's a difficult job," said the man. "He has been carrying on awful for the last ten days. I was doing a job of bush-work here, and I see'd him when he first come'd up. He wouldn't touch nothing; and the publican, he comes up and wishes him good-day, and talks so —— politeful to him, and asks if he mightn't have the pleasure of a drink in his company. And the old un, I could see, was burning inside; but he sez 'No! I'm agoin' home to my wife and kids this time,—first time for nigh on twelve years.'

"'Well,' sez the publican, 'here's success to the journey, and the missis, and the young ones;—you won't refuse that? I'll bring it out to you,—you needn't get off your horse,' he sez. And then he watched the poor old —— drain it up to the last drop, and kept him yarning until it commenced a-workin' on him, and by-and-by the old fool gets off, and hitches up his horse, and goes inside.

"Well, afore night, old Graham was as drunk as ever he was in his life; and I see'd him pulling out a handful of cheques, and heerd him a-sayin' to the publican, as he handed them across the bar, 'Take care o' my money for me.' How much it was, I dunno, but it looked a good bit; and since then he hasn't been sober for an hour together. He have been a-shoutin' shampain all round for days. He'll kill hisself this time, I do believe," continued the man. "He had a bad fit of the devils last night." John hereupon arranged that the speaker should endeavour to coax Graham away, and look after him, promising him a five-pound note should he succeed in getting him sober, and wages during the time spent in recovering him,—and with a heavy heart he left the den of death.

On finishing his business, and returning up the street, he fell in with the Barham Downs Super, walking, as usual, with his inseparable companion, the gentleman in charge of Bindarobina, and Dowlan. They were about visiting the Bindarobina horse, Sir Eustace; and on their invitation John proceeded with them to the stables.

Sir Eustace was in a large loose-box; and as his master undid the surcingle, and stripped the clothing off his beautiful form, he uttered a low whine of greeting, rubbing, at the same time, his soft velvet muzzle gently on the familiar shoulder. A more beautiful horse never carried jock to victory; and as the bystanders gazed at him, the conviction was impressed upon them that he "looked a winner all over." He was of a bright bay colour, with a small spot of white on his forehead; standing a trifle lower in front than behind, with a grand shoulder and glorious propelling-power. His lean head bore gameness unmistakably stamped upon it.

"He's a knowing old rascal," said his doting master. "He knows quite well that he is going to race soon, and he loves it. We never require to muzzle him

before the race-day. He is quite aware when the struggle is to come off, from having his racing-plates put on, getting his mane plaited, and doing no work the previous day; and he wouldn't touch a bite for anything. What a surpriser these Sydney fellows will get! They think nothing can touch their horse. I am going to send this fellow down to Randwick next spring."

John had no idea that the horse was really so good. He had heard much talk about him, but had set a great deal down to "blowing."

"How will your horse shape alongside, West?" asked the Bindarobina man.

"Well," returned the latter, "I certainly did not expect him to have to travel in such company, I confess; but although untried, he is, I think, a good horse, and a fast one too."

"Now I'll put you three up to something," said Sir Eustace's owner, confidentially. "We're all old friends; and you, Dowlan, I know, are backing the old horse. The fact is," he continued, looking around and lowering his voice, "this fellow has been doing the same distance every morning as that Sydney horse in a couple of seconds less time, with half a stone to spare on his back—for one of my men has a chum in their stable, and I can depend on what he says."

"By Jove!" ejaculated John, "it's lucky I'm not a betting man."

Dowlan shuddered inwardly as he thought how differently his book looked now. He felt that he had been too cunning, and had over-reached himself with a vengeance. Excusing himself on the plea of duty, he hurried off to find Ralf and Cane, in order to communicate to them what he had heard.

"Don't bother yourself," said the latter worthy; "I can put that all square."

"How do you mean?" asked the sub-inspector, anxiously.

"Did you never hear of a horse going wrong?"

"Oh yes—but——"

"But I suppose you would rather lose your money than not," sneered the other.

"I don't see what is to be done."

"I'll tell you what you can do. It's customary, is it not, to station one of your men on duty at the stables the night before the races?"

"It is."

"Well, haven't you got some duffer or drunken devil you can put there to-morrow night, and leave the rest to me?"

Dowlan hesitated. He was not afraid of doing so, but he feared the consequences. Supposing anything went wrong, and his share was discovered; but then, supposing he lost his bets. It was now too late to hedge.

"Well," he answered, "mind, I know nothing; but I'll manage that for you."

So they parted. John returned to his quarters at the hospitable station, where fun and jollity were the order of the day and night. The floor of the wool-shed had been swept clean, and the walls hung with rugs and blankets of various gay colours. Numbers of lamps occupied every available position. These were improvised for the occasion, and really looked elegant. A wide-mouthed French prune-jar of clear glass, half full of bright water, formed the stand; down the mouth of this was inserted the neck of an inverted clear glass whisky-bottle, which had been cut through the middle, and a wire fixed in the cork, which still remained in the whisky-bottle, served to sustain a wick. The inverted half of the whisky-bottle was partly filled with water and partly with strained liquid fat, which of course floated on the water and encompassed the wick. Here the whole party assembled after dinner and danced to the music of an accordion, flute, and violin, the players being members of the orchestra band, hired by the race-ball

committee to perform at the great gathering next evening.

It was a thoroughly enjoyable affair, especially for the ladies, who, being much fewer in number than the gentlemen, were consequently in great request. Even the young damsels of eleven and twelve years were eagerly sought after as partners, and picked and chose among their suitors with a discriminating dignity worthy of London *belles*. Old and young, not even excepting Mrs Gray, and their kind though immensely stout hostess,—none of them missed a dance; until the orchestra, fairly overcome with the joint fatigues of eating, drinking, and performing, declared that they must reserve their energies for the following evening.

The next day was spent in a somewhat similar manner to the former one by the men. The ladies, however, had much mysterious confabulation together about dresses, &c. Little knots of them were clustered here and there, discussing matters, or busily at work, until lunch-time; after which, some on horseback and others in buggies, they made their way into the township, where they settled themselves according to invitation, at various friends' houses, or at hotels, to prepare for the ball.

This being the only event of the kind held in the district, and its occurrence being only once a-year, it naturally caused great excitement. For months in advance it was anticipated, and dresses were discussed and prepared by the fair devotees of Terpsichore; and for months afterwards it served them as a theme of conversation. All the ladies of the neighbourhood attended it, as well as those of the town. It was unfortunately quite impossible to keep the assembly as select as the more aristocratic of the female portion of the community would have wished, on account of their small number as compared with that of the gentlemen; and the success of the affair depending upon the largeness of the attendance, it was arranged

that, as usual, one portion of the hall of the court-house in which it was held should be reserved for the "nobs," and the other part for the public generally. Still a line had to be drawn. Discrimination had to be shown somewhere. A number of Chinamen who had induced white women to participate in their joys and sorrows, had settled in the little town, and the committee were sternly severe in refusing to issue cards to the mottled population.

The much-longed-for hour arrived at last. The ladies were dressed with considerable taste, but much diversity existed in the gentlemen's toilets. Some, indeed, appeared in rigorous black; there was also a uniform or two, the resplendent owners of which never failed to secure partners; but others there were who, not having visited town for some years, had long forsworn the ceremonial evening attire, and, unwilling to miss the fun, came in white. All, however, enjoyed themselves greatly. The bar-girls, bullock-drivers' wives, and servants, kept themselves at the lower end of the room, where perhaps the dancing was of a more vigorous and less ceremonious character than that which characterised the other part, still the utmost decorum prevailed; and although some irritation was excited among the more select, owing to the desertion of two or three gentlemen who, after supper, sought relief from the conventionalities of high life among the less fastidious classes, yet everything, on the whole, went off with much success, and the Yering race-ball and its incidents were the subject of many a fair head's thoughts as it sought its pillow for long afterwards.

John left earlier than the rest to attend to his horse. He had not much hope of securing the Yering Cup since his visit to Sir Eustace, but he nevertheless looked forward to a fair chance for the Maiden Plate.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE RACE — OLD GRAHAM'S FATE.

He was astir early, and after effecting his arrangements, rode into town, followed by Tommy, leading Emin Bey in clothing.

Yering wore its gayest dress. Every one seemed on the spree; and from an early hour saddled horses in groups were hitched up to every door, or stood in stock-yards awaiting their riders.

John went straight through to the race-course, which lay about two miles out of town on the other side, and soon the Bey was accommodated with a stall in the shed which ran around the saddling-paddock, among a crowd of others, closely attended by Tommy.

Rumours were flying about that the Bindarobina horse had broken down, but as yet nobody could tell anything with certainty.

Horses in clothing were being led up and down, or ridden gently by young lads, who strove hard to assume a knowing turfy look. A few of the most enthusiastic sporting men were here and there discussing the qualities of the various competitors, or scrutinising their appearance, or endeavouring to pick up the latest intelligence about them.

Presently the grand stand began to fill, and rumour resolves itself into certainty. Sir Eustace is unfit to run. Gone in one of his feet. Nobody knows exactly what it is. Supposed to have had a sudden strain, or given himself a knock. What a pity, thinks John,

that such a noble creature should be crippled! however, it gives him a better chance, and he may yet win the Cup himself.

By-and-by the inhabitants of Yering stream out in a long line,—mostly on horseback, some in buggies, and a few on foot. Who would have believed that there were so many in the little place? Even the blacks are dressed out, for the nonce, in battered old hats, and tattered old garments, and hasten to join in the "white-fellows'" holiday.

Mr Gray's party have arrived in a buggy, and Bessie is wild with excitement. Phœbe also feels enthusiasm welling up within her; and although, for reasons best known to herself, she does not, like Bessie, wear Fitzgerald's colours—magenta and buff—she is quite as anxious about the Bey's success. Stone is now down in the saddling-paddock talking with John or some other of his friends; now at Bessie's side giving her information, and taking a manly pride in proclaiming to the assembled multitude the tender relationship about to exist between them.

Dowlan, who is extremely vain, takes advantage of his duty as policeman to display himself to the public, and moves about on a capering horse, smirking to the rich, and growling at the poor. The Clerk of Petty Sessions officiates as Clerk of the Course. He is not much of a sportsman, and he can barely hold on to his quiet cob; but he loves to attire himself once a-year in his red coat, velvet cap, boots, and breeches. This is his gala-day; he has no other opportunity of displaying his glories: during the rest of the year he has to content himself with occasionally donning the scarlet in his own room at night, when Yering is steeped in slumber. As he jogs past, with his toes turned out, and his elbows looking like the handles of a pitcher, his "military" seat is the theme of much jocular comment.

The upright old police magistrate, a very dis-

tinguished retired officer, is judge. The stewards bustle about with much importance.

Many of the swell-mob have found their road to this out-of-the-way meeting; and some members of the ring make themselves conspicuous, as, surrounded by a circle of constituents, note-book and pencil in hand, they shout the odds,—Two to one bar one! Two to one bar one! Take the field bar one!—and so on, in their rapid jargon. Nor have the book-makers alone journeyed up to the carcass. Other birds of prey, in the shape of roulette-table owners, thimble-riggers, card-swindlers, and the host of other thieves who ply their calling on the various courses, are busily at work. A few of the fair sex, attended by their cavaliers, have a spurt round the course; a drunken bushman gets a spill off his horse before the crowd, near the grand stand, and is carried away with a broken collar-bone.

The Yering lawyer, who is by no means a popular individual, drives up the course in his new buggy. He leaves the horses standing in front of the grand stand, while he renews an old-standing acquaintance with "Mr Jas. Hennessey's battle-axe;" but the horses, frightened by the unaccustomed noise, move off. Now they trot. The lawyer rushes out bare-headed, with his tumbler in his hand, shouting to the people to stop them, but no one puts out a hand. Now they canter, with the reins trailing. In vain he runs holloaing; they break into a gallop, which grows into desperate speed. They come to a hurdle. The crowd cheer, and roar out "Over." They take the sticks together in gallant style; but the buggy, smashed to atoms, remains on the other side, and away they go with the pole between them. Hurray! its only the lawyer's trap. Now a bell rings, and the jocks, with their saddles, &c., over their arms, get weighed; the horses are saddled, and the boys mounted. Once more the bell rings.

Now they are led out. Look, there goes one! How the green-and-gold silk jacket shivers as the horse rushes past in his preparatory canter! Here's another. "Oh, what a darling of a horse!" cries Bessie, as a beautiful chestnut filly tears past, ridden by a tiny-looking child in pink and silver. Now some more go to the post. Now they are marshalled. The starter lowers his flag. Off! Away they fly,—there they speed altogether. At last they round the corner and come up the straight. The tiny boy, sitting well down, his hands low, occasionally glances warily over his shoulder at his nearest rival, whose horse's head, extended to its utmost, cannot draw up farther than the handsome chestnut's girth. Hark! how the hoofs thunder for a moment as they fly past!

Hurrah! Cheers. A general relief; and as the chestnut with her rider is led a winner past the grand stand, Bessie feels inclined to run down and kiss the child.

"You're better where you are," gravely returns Stone. "He's a perfect young imp."

Now the excitement increases. The Maiden Plate is to be run for. Tommy's youngest brother, Dick, a knowing, cool little fellow, is to steer the Bey to victory if possible; and many an injunction he receives from his big brother, which he faithfully promises to observe.

The weighing is over; the little mite of a saddle is girthed on, its white web bands showing distinctly against the glossy black satin skin. Now the boy is lifted on, and John leads his horse down the course a little, watched by more than one pair of bright eyes, who take an interest in the creature for his master's sake. There he rushes past. "That's the Ungahrun horse—that's Emin Bey," is heard on all sides; and clannish Ungahrun stockmen offer to back him for all they are worth.

Ralf and Cane are also there. They do not intend to race their horse until the morrow, and are engaged at present with their books. Presently Ralf catches sight of Tommy, whom he recognises as a servant of Fitzgerald's, and a memory comes across him. He surely knows that black horse also. He remembers him when a colt, and gets deeply interested. A sinking, foreboding feeling of evil steals over him. He has laid heavily against Emin Bey, chiefly from a feeling of dislike to Fitzgerald.

Listen! The race is an exciting one. "Emin Bey!" "Tropic!" "Antoinette!" "Emin Bey!" "Tropic!" "Emin Bey!" "Emin Bey!" "Emin B-e-e-e-y!" Here they come! The Ungahrun horse has freed himself from his antagonists, and wins in a canter, hard held.

Much acclamation is heard on all sides, and the Ungahrun men are jubilant over the victory of the station horse. Tommy busies himself in rubbing the Bey down, and leads him off home. The Betyammo party are in high spirits, and John is congratulated many times. A few more races are run, and all return to town. The road is a long string of galloping horses — all the Yering fair sex, like most of their sisters in Australia, caring nothing for any other pace. The buggies drive swiftly home, each escorted by two or three sportsmen.

John had observed Sir Eustace's owner and the Barham Downs Super on the course, but he had then no leisure to inquire about the horse's accident. As he now rides up to the stable there is a small crowd round it. The groom is declaiming violently against some person or persons unknown: he is of opinion that his horse has been wilfully hurt, and various opinions are expressed. No one knows exactly what is wrong. It is a hurt in the foot. The noble creature lifts his foot for each one to examine it. He is shorn of his glory. How changed he looks with his piteous

expression and his foot held up, shrinking from the smallest touch, from the form which he showed the day before—gallant, bold, and reckless!

"Something seems to have penetrated the foot in a downward direction from the coronet," says John; but he cannot detect an orifice or a drop of blood, yet the hoof is extremely sensitive. It is quite clear that he cannot race to-morrow; if so, and the Sydney horse wins, more money will change hands than has done so on Yering course for many a year.

John rides back to more merry-making; round games are being played, in the soft bright moonlight, on the thick sward. An impromptu dance is got up by some insatiable spirits who are not knocked up with previous exertions, but the turf is scarcely springy enough, and vocal music is tried instead.

John awoke next morning in a state of much anxious excitement. He found that the hopes of his district rested upon the Bey as a last resource, for so firm a favourite was Sir Eustace, that Ralf and Cane got any odds they chose against their horse. Tommy, on the contrary, was perfectly calm. He was quite aware what was to be done, and he felt convinced that the Bey had the right stuff in him. He was indeed so great a believer in the animal, that he would willingly have become a martyr at the stake for the sincerity of his opinion.

The day wore on; the first few races had been run, and now the grand event of the meeting is going to come off—but under very different circumstances to what was expected. It is now almost a foregone conclusion, and ruefully does many a one think of the emptiness which will fill his pocket presently. Besides which, they hate being cleaned out by these Sydney turfites, with their bumptious self-assertion. The Bindarobina man and his friend assist John and Tommy as far as they are able; and if good wishes

could make his horse win, theirs would soon enable him to distance all competitors.

The Sydney crack, Errol, a fine golden-brown horse, the picture of a racer, is being attended to by a party of horsey cads, who pique themselves on their knowledge of town racing, as compared with this bush affair.

The bell rings—the jocks are weighed; and as it rings again, they make their way to the post. Dick, who has unlimited faith in himself and his horse, sets his face like cast-iron,—he is resolute to uphold the credit of the district. Several other horses are to start also, but none of them have a chance. Errol is a steady, quiet-tempered horse, too honest for the crew who own him. He is ready to start at the word; but Cane knows that Emin Bey's temper is an irritable, nervous one, and his jockey has received instructions to make a false start or two if he can. The Bey is unaccustomed to being checked in this way, and rears the first time in a manner perfectly appalling to behold, while Tommy grinds his teeth and swears inwardly.

The Betyammo party are once more in the grand stand, and the enthusiasm has increased to the highest pitch. Old Mr Gray would sooner than a hundred pounds that the Sydney horse should be beaten. Bessie is breathless, and Phœbe says nothing; but her face is white. The Sydney men make sneering remarks as they stand in a little group, feeling secure of victory.

Off! Away they go at last, on the wings of the wind, with the noise of the whirlwind! They are past. Dead silence reigns.

It is not reality. We are looking at one of the great paintings of the turf. The same scene,—the horses stretched to their utmost, the many-coloured jockeys standing up in their stirrups, their backs bent, their heads low. It seems an age until they turn the far corner. Two are now racing side by side,—the rest are away behind, yet still holding on at their best

speed. Now a murmur is heard, and it increases into excited shouts as each second varies the fortunes of the race. The horses are so close together, no one can tell which has the advantage. Roars of encouragement from the backers of both greet the riders. Errol's jock calls upon his horse as he passes the grand stand, and making a determined spurt, the generous steed succeeds in getting a head's length in front of Emin Bey, but only for an instant.

Dick feels what his horse is capable of, and, pulling him together, wakens him up for a final effort, and lands him a victor by a short neck, amid deafening applause from the excited crowd, who toss their hats and helmets into the air and kick them about, shake hands with each other, and cheer as if each one had attained the wish his heart most desired.

Dick receives a perfect ovation as he is led back bareheaded to the scales; and Bessie finds, to her astonishment, in the midst of her smiles, that her face is quite wet; while Phœbe, so pale a minute before, is now as red as any rose. Not less delighted and excited is John, who has his hand nearly wrung off by numerous enthusiastic individuals, who at this moment are ready to devote their lives and fortunes towards sustaining the honour of the district. Tommy takes things more coolly,—he asks a question or two of Dick, and leads the Bey off to be thoroughly strapped and clothed; but to-night in the stables he will throw his arms round his beauty's neck, and whisper loving words to him, as he makes up his bed with rather more than usual care, in grateful memory of his achievements. Cane is furious.

The race has been so fairly run that there is no chance of protesting against the decision of the judge; and cursing his horse and its rider, his ill luck, and himself and companion, he seeks consolation in the bottle, assisted by Ralf, who is reduced to despair. He is overwhelmed with the amount of calamity

which he feels impending, and the bitterness of defeat has to him an additional poignancy when he thinks of the impending exposure of his frauds in Sydney.

Dowlan as usual has joined the winning side. He has no fear that his share in Sir Eustace's business will come to light, but he has been mixed up in other underhand manœuvres, and he has to crawl through slime, and lie and fawn into the good graces of those to whom his greed and foiled schemes have made him a debtor. He must endeavour to work through somehow, and already he has told a number of stories discreditable to his former associates, placing himself in the light of a victim.

The Barham Downs and Bindarobina men are almost better pleased than if the race had turned out as they had anticipated. Emin Bey's victory has saved them each more money than they could well afford to lose; and as John rides into Yering, they join Mr Gray and Stone and the old honest Oorgootoolah squatter in cheering him loudly. But alas! his pleasure is not unalloyed, for he is informed by the man who has undertaken to look after old Graham, that his charge has been missing since the morning previous.

The old overseer had been seized with a dreadful attack of *delirium tremens* on the evening when John had seen him, and was with much difficulty kept in the house during the night. Towards morning he had grown quieter, and his guardian had left the house in which he was for a short time, to find on his return that the old man was gone. Whither? No one knew. He had searched during the day himself, and having got bushed in the intricacies of a scrub into which the tracks of the missing man had led him, he was unable to report the occurrence sooner.

The police magistrate at once despatched a couple of white constables, with a black tracker, to trace the footsteps from the place where they had last been seen.

John rode home with a depressed mind. As he passed the public-house which had proved "the lion in the old man's path," he saw the publican, a bloated, greasy-faced man, with a villanous, low forehead, and a prize-fighting look, walking up and down the verandah in a "boiled shirt" (old Graham had worn flannel since he left his married home), snowy-white trousers, and carpet slippers, his waist girded with a scarlet sash, narrating with coarse glee to a fellow-poisoner how he had "copped the old —— on the hop," and "lambed him down to rights."

The bar was still thronged, and the effects of the mixture of spirits of wine, blue-stone, and tobacco-juice, were to be seen on a miserable wretch who lay stretched in the courtyard, among a heap of broken bottles, empty sardine-tins, and smashed-up boxes.

"I'd like to have the punishing of you," thought our hero. "I'd make you drink a tumblerful of the dregs of one of your own casks every day for a week."

Next morning, on riding into the township to inquire for the poor old man, he found the police magistrate and one or two justices of the peace about starting to hold a magisterial inquiry on his body. He had been found late the night previous, lying perfectly dead in a small gully in the scrub.

John joined the others, and was horror-struck at the sight which presented itself on reaching the place. Graham had evidently been dead nearly two days. He lay on his back, swelled to twice his natural size, his legs and arms drawn up tightly to his body, one hand clenching a butcher's knife. His eyes glared awfully. His mouth was open, out of which protruded a swollen tongue, the centre of a thick mass of crawling, creeping, burrowing, white maggots, some of which occasionally tumbled over the swollen blue lips, and rolled along the long grey beard. On opening his shirt a similarly disgusting sight was to be observed,—hatfuls of the hateful creatures were to be

seen under his arms, while millions of fearful-looking flies buzzed around him. About his neck, a cord, to which was suspended a small bag, cut deeply into the swollen flesh. This, on being opened, was found to contain, wrapped in numerous folds of paper and oilskin, three or four locks of light-brown hair, and one long tress of a darker shade.

Alas, poor Graham! the adder that stung thee was of thine own fostering.

Owing to the decomposed state of the body, no further examination was effected, and the inquiry came to an end, all being satisfied that drink alone had brought about the dreadful results.

Another piece of intelligence was made public during the day. On applying poultices to Sir Eustace's wounded foot, the broken end of a strong darning-needle was discovered and extracted, upon which the animal became very much easier. Suspicion pointed to the Sydney men, but nothing was certain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

EVIL COUNSEL AND EVIL DEEDS—M'DUFF'S DEATH.

THE next day saw Yering deserted of its visitors. Almost all the station people wended their ways homeward, and only a few of the labouring classes remained to spend the small remnant of money which they still possessed.

How Cane and Ralf staved off the most pressing of their creditors' demands, they themselves only knew. The horse had been seized at the instance of the hotel-keeper with whom they boarded, and they had apparently nothing to go upon except the position of Ralf's father, which procured for them some credit in the way of food and drink. This morning, they sat together over a bottle of brandy, to which both, especially Cane, had frequent recourse.

"Well," said Ralf, sulkily, "you have managed to get us into a nice mess."

"Shut up, you growling ——. You're the biggest sneak hi hever comed hacross. You halways turns round hon yer mates when things don't go just right," returned his amiable friend.

"No wonder!" answered the latter; "you make yourself out so —— knowing, and you let a —— bush-horse quietly walk off with stakes big enough to put us on our legs again, without bets. I wouldn't have cared so much if it hadn't belonged to that —— stuck-up Fitzgerald."

"D—— him!" echoed the other. "Hi'd sooner hit 'ad been 'im than that hother cussed pup whot hi

saw a-lookin' hafter 'im. Hi'll settle that ——'s 'ash yet, hif hi gets 'alf a slant,—hi will, s'elp me, for the sake hof this business."

"Bosh!—you're always skyting about what you'll do. What can you do now, when we want some good advice? That's more to the purpose——"

"Can't you get that 'ere —— hold M'Duff to lend you some cash?" asked Cane.

"He'd sooner give me his blood," returned Ralf; "besides, this forgery business is blown all over the country by this time, and people will be shy of taking his cheques."

"Didn't you say has 'ow a diggin's butcher wos a comin' there to buy sheep?"

'By Jove," uttered Ralf, a new light breaking in upon him, "we might get any amount of gold, if we could lay our hands on it! Those fellows nearly always pay in pure metal.'

"You sed has 'ow the hold boy was agoin' down to Sydney habout them 'ere forged flimsies. Hif we could get 'old of 'is valise, we might put that little business to rights too; burn them, hand square hourselves with the gold for a fresh start hin Sydney."

"Right you are," returned Ralf, admiringly; "you have got a brain. I believe it's easy enough done."

"Hof course hit is. We'll cut away there. Hi'll camp hin the bush. You stay hup hat the 'ouse,—find hout 'is plans, and get 'old of the valise, 'and it hover to me, hand hi'll stow hit away hall serene."

Accordingly, they both started for Cambaranga. Ralf, who had an intimate knowledge of the country around the station, pointed out a place to Cane, in close proximity to the head-station, where he might remain camped for some time in secrecy, and then made his own way to the house.

It was dark when he arrived. Mr M'Duff was at home, as well as a young man who had been engaged to fill the position of overseer vacated by old Graham.

M'Duff was by no means in a good humour. Whether he suspected Ralf as the thief who was preying on what he worked so hard for, and loved so much, or whether it was that he merely disliked and despised the character of the young man, was hard to say. His manner was more than usually stern and gruff. The news of old Graham's death did not seem to affect him much. He knew his worth, and appreciated his good qualities; but he had expected the catastrophe so long, that it was by no means a shock. His mind was much more disturbed about the forgeries which had interfered with the currency of his cheques; and he produced one after another, which had been sent up for his inspection, until Ralf saw all the evidences of his crime before him on the table. If he could only get possession of them!

In the course of the evening he learnt that M'Duff intended starting for Sydney next day, to give personal evidence in the affair, which he was determined to investigate thoroughly. The butcher from the gold-fields had come, and only left that morning; therefore his gold must still be in the house.

If Ralf could only lay his hand on that valise, he would never get into such a scrape again,—never, never!

He could not listen to what M'Duff said, so busy was he planning his measures. At last it was bedtime, and all retired to their rooms; but Ralf cannot sleep, —he sits and ponders. After a couple of hours' time, he slips off his boots, and makes his way over to the house in which M'Duff sleeps. The superintendent's heavy measured breathing is heard from the bed. Where can he have put his papers and the gold? He intends starting early; he has surely packed his valise. It is so dark he knocks against a chair slightly, and M'Duff's quick ear warns him. He opens his eyes. "Who is there?" he asks, in his stern, deep voice. Ralf is close to the door—he steps out, and hasten-

ing over to his room, jumps into bed, and draws the blankets over him as he is. Presently he notices a light; and M'Duff walks across the courtyard, comes straight to his room, and looks in through the open door. Ralf is breathing hard in apparently sound sleep, and the superintendent goes away satisfied to the other man's room, and then walks back to his own. Ralf dares not try it again. He lies for an hour or two revolving plans, and decides on consulting Cane. Accordingly, he made his way out to the spot where that worthy was camped. It was about half a mile distant, in a small patch of rocky, broken country, beside a little spring; and awakening him, he narrated what he had learnt.

"Hit's hall no —— use," remarked Cane, on learning full particulars. "The hold fellow 'as got heverythink stowed haway, so has yer can't lays yer 'ands hon it. I votes we stick 'im hup hon the road."

Ralf frightened. "Robbery!" he said.

"Robbery!" sneered the other, mimicking the tone. "Wot was yer about to-night, eh? Don't be a —— fool now, and spile hall. Find hout which way he means to take, hand come 'ere immediately hafter, and we'll manage some'ow. Now get halong back before ye're missed."

With this they parted, and Ralf had a good hour in bed before daylight broke. M'Duff was up early, and had his horse ready. Ralf, to blind him to the real state of affairs, pretended laziness, and came in late to breakfast, keeping his eyes and ears open all the time. M'Duff tells his last night's adventure, and persists in believing some one was in his room. The new overseer laughs loudly, much to M'Duff's disgust, for he is not given to creating false alarms. He informs them that he is going down the "mailman's old track," which will save him twenty miles in the journey. Ralf knows it well. It is a narrow bridle-path, leading partly through thick scrubby country,

and partly over mountains. Here and there the track is very indistinct, and in some places there is none. It is only known to the older station hands, and is seldom traversed now, although formerly the mailman used it; but his route is now changed. M'Duff knows it well also. It would take him a day and a half by the main road to accomplish what he can do by this path in one. He brings out his valise. Ralf thinks it looks heavy. M'Duff straps it on, and mounting, nods a hasty good-bye, and is off. Ralf is on tenter-hooks to go to Cane, but the overseer is in the way. The man is polite to his employer's son, and would like to become acquainted with him, and therefore delays his business to indulge in a chat. But Ralf's gruff, uncivil answers drive him off; and catching his horse, the sociable young fellow goes away whistling.

Ralf now gets his horse also, and is soon detailing his knowledge to Cane, who, without a word, straps his few effects on the horse which he has already saddled.

"Come hon," he said. "Lead the way hon to the track, hand push halong, hif yer don't want to miss yer last chance."

A roundabout way brought them to the "mailman's track," and soon they were cantering along it in silence, glancing eagerly ahead of them for their prey. As they hurry on, Cane explains his plan to Ralf. They were both provided with revolvers, which many people in the bush carry. These they slung in their belts, to give them the appearance of bushrangers, while a red handkerchief apiece, in which holes had been cut for their eyes, was a sufficient disguise. Their clothes were in no wise different from those of fifty others, and they feared not being recognised. They hurried on faster,—they are now about eighteen miles from home, and expect to see the quarry every minute. At last they notice him about a couple of hundred yards ahead, as he leaves a small open space to enter some timber.

Cane now takes the lead; he hunts now by sight. Making a detour to get in front, and whispering fiercely to Ralf that, "should he fail to stick by him," he "will never see another day's light," he rushes out on the unsuspecting man. "Bail up! bail up!" shout the two red-veiled attackers, revolvers in hand. "Throw hup yer harms, or hi'll drop yer!" shouts Cane, intimidatingly.

But M'Duff is not to be got so easily; and hitting his horse with the spurs, he tears along shouting "Never!" and brandishing his stout hunting-crop. Both men gallop alongside, threatening his life once more; and perhaps the determination of the Super might have caused them to give up the attempt, had not Ralf's handkerchief fallen off. M'Duff turning at the time, recognised him, and uttering his name in fierce tones, as he struck about him wildly with his whip, vowed that he should hang for the attempt on his life.

"Shoot him, Ralf!" cries Cane. "Shoot the hold ——, or he'll 'ave yer blood."

Ralf's trembling fingers might have obeyed the fearful command, when a smashing blow from the hunting-crop knocked the revolver out of his hand, and saved him the commission of the dreadful crime. But in the same moment "crack" goes one of the chambers of Cane's six-shooter; and he has rivalled his great namesake and antitype, the first murderer.

The grim, money-loving old Super—so firm and fair in some things—so heartless and lax in others—falls from his saddle. His foot getting entangled in the stirrup-iron, the body is dragged along by the frantic horse, striking against stumps and roots, and being kicked at furiously by the animal, against whose hind-legs it is occasionally dashed with violence. The road is strewn with little articles belonging to the unfortunate man. His helmet lies at the spot where the shot was fired, his whip farther on, then his knife and matches, and then some plugs of tobacco; a little

farther lies scattered some money, then clots of blood, —and a mark of the trailing body runs all along the road.

Cane and Ralf were at first seriously alarmed lest the animal should become maddened with fear and make its escape, valise and all; but the stirrup-leather comes off, and the body falls to the ground. Soon after, they succeed in catching the frightened steed, and lead him back snorting to where its master lies a pitiful sight, with his grizzly hair and beard a thick mass of dust and blood, his face almost undistinguishable with bruises. Twenty minutes before, he was in full vigour, his mind occupied with plans for his earthly welfare; and now his spirit, that "wandering fire," has joined old Graham's in pioneering the "dark, undiscovered shore" of that black river from which no explorer's report has ever been received.

With eager haste they tear off the valise and examine the contents. They pull out handkerchiefs and collars, a couple of shirts, and some other articles of clothing, a cheque-book, some papers (only accounts). What! no money! none of the hated forged cheques!

"Examine his pockets," says Cane.

Ralf shrinks from touching the fearful thing.

"Curse your white liver!" snarls the red-handed man, fit for any deed now,—and, bending down, he turns out pocket after pocket. Nothing! (Indeed, M'Duff had made up the post-bag before leaving, into which he had put the forged cheques, as well as the crossed cheque which he had received from the "diggings" butcher, and by this time the mailman was hastening with them along another road down to town.) In his rage he vents his resentment by kicking the helpless clay, saying, "You put me hout hall night in the bush wonst—hit's your turn now."

Ralf is getting stupefied; he is only now waking up to what has occurred.

"Come halong, you fool!" shouts the chief villain;

"let's get the carcass hout o' this some'ow, hand then we'll see wot's to be done."

A couple of deep round lagoons lay alongside of the track; and half carrying, half dragging the body between them, they threw it into the black water on the far side from the road. The water splashed and surged in widening circles, wetting their feet as they stood on the banks. What a relief to get rid of that evidence of guilt—motionless, inanimate, but more terrible than any living witness! The valise and saddle weighted with stones, are likewise flung into the pool, and every evidence of the crime is carefully hidden from sight.

And now Cane, whose mind seems to have grown clearer and stronger with the emergency, gives instructions to the trembling wretch beside him as to what must be done. They had passed some miles back a small gunyah and yard temporarily occupied by a flock of "hospital" sheep, shepherded by an old black gin.

Cane, alive to the urgent necessity of obliterating all tracks, orders Ralf to go to the place and cause the old woman, who knows him, and is likely to obey his orders without hesitation, to drive her sheep out here for a night, and camp near the water-hole. He is aware that the tracks of the sheep on the road will hide the footprints of the galloping horses and the trailing of the body, and that as they crowd round the margin of the lagoon in their anxiety to drink, all marks there will be effaced. He impresses the necessity on Ralf of getting home quickly and unobservedly, and of examining all M'Duff's papers. He himself will cross the bush and make for another station at some considerable distance off, so that he may establish an *alibi* if necessary; and in two or three days' time he will return to the camp where he spent the previous night. Ralf can meet him there.

Now that M'Duff is out of the way, Ralf will have

charge, and can easily put matters right as regards business. But first of all, they must set this straight.

After undergoing much advising, threatening, imploring, and sneering, Ralf is ready to start. Cane then parted with him, taking the murdered man's horse, which he has decided to shoot in the first thick scrub he comes to at a sufficient distance from the spot.

Ralf rode as one in a dream. He succeeded in finding the sheep, and, making some excuse, he started the half-crazed old woman with them to the lagoons. Then he galloped home half frenzied with fear, his mind dwelling on the tragedy he had so lately borne a part in. The young overseer had not returned, and Ralf breathes more freely as he turned his horse into the paddock and sought his room. There was something clinging to him which he could not shake off. Go where he would, something awful there was at his elbow—a fearful load on his soul! Outwardly he was the same as this morning, but inwardly—— An indefinable terror haunted him. He threw himself on his bed. "O God! O God! O God!" He started as he uttered the holy name. What had he done? The whiteness of his soul had long, long ago been smudged with black dirt; and now, after years of absence, on the same ground he had changed its colour to a brighter hue, but a darker stain. The overseer rode up merrily. A happy, careless lad, he strode in with a cheery remark, but suddenly stopping, asked if Ralf was ill.

"Only a bad headache," he was answered. "I'm often like this." He could eat nothing. That night, when all was silent, he stole over to the dead man's chamber. How he abhorred the cursed money! Sooner a thousand times over would he have appeared before the world as a defaulter, or as a thief, than as he now was; yet it must be done. Each article put him in mind of his victim. Guiltily he glanced over his shoulder, fancying that he heard stealthy footsteps,

or that a voice whispered something in his ear. Nothing could he find. No money—no cheques; nothing of any value. And the deed had been done uselessly —uselessly. O God! what is that on the bed? An indistinct form shapes itself. He almost faints. Tush! it is only the washing, which the woman has laid out there. Back to his room, where, amid incoherent ravings and agonies of mind, he passed the rest of that awful night. He wished Cane would return. He wanted to look once more on the *spot*, to see that all was right; but he dared not. What if the old gin, with the sharp eyes her race is celebrated for, has detected the tracks? Her instinctive sagacity would enable her to follow up the clue. All the day succeeding, and the night which followed, and the day after, Ralf remained in a state of mind bordering on insanity. The overseer and woman in the kitchen, indeed, began to suspect that the brandy which he had procured from M'Duff's store, and which he drank in immense quantities, was about to produce a fit of horrors; but, strange to say, it had no effect whatever on his agitated system. The day was now at hand when Cane promised to return to the rendezvous, and Ralf counted every minute until his stronger-minded associate should assist him in bearing a share of the oppressing secret.

That evening a horseman was announced approaching; and Ralf, concluding that Cane had changed his intentions, and had decided upon staying at the house, ran out to meet him. It was not Cane, however, but Ralf's father, Mr Cosgrove, sen. He had, in consequence of the unsatisfactory information which had reached him, started out from home very suddenly; and leaving Ruth in Sydney, where he had received further disquieting intelligence, he had continued his journey to Cambaranga, to confer with M'Duff about the very business which was taking the latter to New South Wales, unknown to his employer and partner.

The unexpected face fell cold upon the guilty heart; but there was something in old associations and blood which, notwithstanding all his weight of guilt, gave to him some measure of comfort. He felt a desire to cling to his father; he felt that there stood the only one who would seek to palliate his wickedness, if possible. His subdued and quiet manner, so different to what his father had ever before noticed in him, struck the elder Cosgrove very much; and he felt that perhaps the young man had seen the folly of his doings, and was about to change.

He met him with a greater show of affection than he had bestowed on the prodigal for some years, and asked for M'Duff.

It was well for Ralf that the young overseer came out just then to answer the question, for he only kept himself from falling by clinging to the paddock-fence. Cosgrove's annoyance at having missed the Super was expressed rather loudly, and the bustle of unsaddling the horse served to divert attention from Ralf, who managed to get inside the house, where he fortified himself by drinking a large quantity of brandy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FEARFUL JOURNEY—HIDING GUILT.

THE activity and excitement consequent on the arrival of Mr Cosgrove relieved Ralf from much observation, and to a certain extent relaxed the strain on his mind. His father's conversation, however, was full of poignant bitterness; and the arrows of remorse fell fast upon him as the elder Cosgrove seemed willing to forget all the old grievances and errors of the past. He would possibly even have hushed up his son's forging transactions, and paid his debts once more, had he made an open confession, and determined to lead a new life; but now there was an impassable gulf fixed between him and ordinary men.

The past life *was* over. A new life had begun. Never again would men take him by the hand and welcome him to their homes. Henceforth he was worse than a pariah—he was a wild beast. As these thoughts kept crossing his mind, a groan, occasioned by his mental distress, would now and then burst from him; and at last, excusing himself on the plea of illness, he again sought his room, to pass another wretched night.

At breakfast next morning he received a still greater shock, for Mr Cosgrove, speaking of his journey, incidentally remarked, "By the way, I came along the mailman's track yesterday. They wanted to dissuade me from doing so at the other end, for they feared I could not find my way after my long absence; and

as I passed the Lilly Lagoon, I fancied I saw something in the water like a dead body."

"A dead body!" laughed the overseer.

"Yes," said Mr Cosgrove. "I did not go close to it. It was something dead, I am sure."

Ralf said nothing; he was pale and rigid, his fingers stiff and cold, his hair rising on his head, his heart beating violently.

"It might have been a sheep, or a kangaroo, or perhaps a calf," suggested the overseer.

"Ah, yes," joined in Ralf—"a calf, no doubt; there are plenty of wild cattle in the scrubs there."

The conversation changed; but his nerves were wrung worse than ever.

Twice he went to the rendezvous, but it was vacant. How he longed for Cane! He even prayed that he might come. His father, noticing his careworn, haggard look, felt alarmed, and proposed sending for a doctor. To this, however, Ralf vehemently objected.

On going the third time, about sundown, to the meeting-place, he saw his brother-in-blood dismounting. He was much relieved. He rushed up, surprising Cane with the fervency of his welcome, and made him acquainted with the fact of his father's sudden arrival, and his having noticed the body. These were two pieces of intelligence which entirely took Cane by surprise; but, equal to the occasion, he spoke after a few minutes' reflection.

"Now, look 'ere: we want to get rid of that carcass—that is the first thing to be done; hand hafter that you can gammon penitent, tell hall to the governor, hand get round 'im, hand you'll be has right has hever. Ten to one 'e'll give you charge 'ere, hand cut 'ome; hand, my word, we'll commence then hon a new lay. Hour luck his honly just a-turning."

"But what shall we do about—about—I mean—that thing over there?" asked Ralf, his voice sinking

to a whisper as he pointed in the direction of the lagoons on the mailman's track.

"Hit's nigh full moon to-night," returned Cane. "'Ave yer got hany quiet 'osses in the paddock?"

"Yes," returned the other. "Why?"

"When they hall goes to bed, we'll get hup the 'osses, saddle a couple, hand lead hout hanother with a pack-saddle, fish the stiff un hout o' the water, hand hump 'im hoff the road somewhere, and make hashes hof 'im. There's plenty hof time to get back hafore morning. Now, cut haway back, and hi'll be hup hat the 'ouse by the time I thinks the rest 'as turned hin. You come hout when you 'ears me a-whistling, hand we'll set to work."

Ralf did as he was bid; but he thought his father and the overseer would never leave off talking, so anxious did he feel to get away out to destroy the evidence of his crime. He could not understand Cane's coolness and indifference.

Just as the rest were rising to retire, he distinguished a long low whistle, not far off. No one noticed it but himself. He gave his stained hand in friendly clasp to the others, and wished them "good night."

Again the whistle. This time he slipped out and spoke a few words to Cane, begging him to wait some minutes longer, until all should have time to fall asleep. About the buildings a quantity of couch-grass grew, which, although short from constant grazing, still afforded very sweet picking to the horses, who were accustomed to come up each night for a short time and feed on it. A number of these were now engaged cropping the short feed. After about a quarter of an hour's waiting, they selected three suitable ones, bridled, saddled, and led them out of the paddock at some distance from the house, through a gap in the fence, which a couple of loose rails

afforded. Then mounting, they made the best of their way along the track.

Cane lit his pipe, and leading the pack-horse, followed the shivering leader as if he had been engaged in the most ordinary occupation in life. Ralf could not speak. He made his way, as if under a mesmeric spell, towards the object which fascinated his mind. He felt that he must look upon it once more, although he hated and feared it. They push along, cantering when they can, for Cane perpetually urges haste. Here it was where they saw him leave the plain and enter the timber.

This is the *spot*. As they turn off the road and approach the lagoons, a turtle drops off a branch of a tree into the water with a splash, and a mob of ducks fly up with an alarming quacking noise and hurried flapping. It startles Ralf, and even Cane loses his equanimity for a little. Now they look for what they know only too well is there. Where is it? They walk side by side round the black pool, for Ralf will not leave his companion's side for one instant.

It is not there. "Can *you* see the —— thing?" inquires Cane.

Ralf shakes his head; but the next minute he stands glaring fixedly at something on the dark water half covered by the broad leaves of the lotus.

"What's yonder floats on the rueful flood?" Ah, they need no one to tell them that!

"Don't be a —— fool now," fiercely grinds out Cane between his teeth. "Here, give us a 'old o' that 'ere long stick, till I fish 'im hout." They had "good luck to their fishing;" and scarcely knowing what he did, Ralf assists in dragging the stiffened form out on the bank and lifting it on to the pack-saddle, where they, or rather Cane, who alone seems to have his wits about him, fastened it as best he could.

A small range of hills not far away rose on their left hand, and Cane directed Ralf to lead the way

across them. It was a terrible journey. Ralf feared to ride on, and feared to stay. The curlew's mournful cry chilled his blood, and the branches of the trees he passed seemed to clutch at him with avenging hands.

"'Old 'ard a bit," utters the man of blood behind; "the —— thing's a-slippin' hoff the 'oss. Get hoff and shove hit hover a bit." Ralf did as he was bid; but in the act of lifting the cold wet burden, his face comes in contact with the weed-entangled, dripping hair. Not for worlds would he touch it again, and Cane is obliged to dismount and readjust matters.

The dead man is lying on his back across the pack-saddle, the moonlight falling full on the pale mangled features, his stiff right arm pointing upward to the sky, as if accusing his murderers before Him who set that silent light above them in the midnight heaven. The pack-horse is a bad leader, and drags behind, compelling them to adopt a funeral pace. As they cross the mountain-ridge, the moon reveals to them a stretch of broken, mountainous, dark-looking country, through which winds a tortuous line of silver water. This place is seldom traversed, on account of the rocky soil and poor pasturage. They descend, and after travelling a mile or two into the heart of it, they come upon a large fallen tree, whose limbs afford abundance of fuel.

"It will do," says Cane. "Get hoff and gather some wood."

Ralf sets to work like a madman. Cane undoes the straps, and giving the ghastly pack a push, upsets it on the ground, where it falls on all-fours,—being supported by the drawn and stiffened limbs. They now cover it with limbs and logs of wood. Hide it from light; shut it out from view. They draw the horses away; and Cane at last, striking a match, sets fire to a pile of dead leaves. There it burns; now it seizes the small stuff, and soon it roars up in a great blaze. He fires the pile in several places. The heat is so great that they are forced to retire for some time,

during which the flames rise higher and fiercer. They sit together at the foot of a large tree. Ralf's head is buried in his hands, which are resting on his knees; while his companion draws out a short black pipe, which he proceeds to light, as he watches the fire, from which fitful gleams fall, sometimes upon his dogged bullet-head and heavy jowl, and sometimes upon the three horses, as they stand tied up close at hand.

At last the flames sink lower—the small stuff is evidently consumed—and rudely pushing Ralf, he orders him to "stick on some more."

As in a dream, his nostrils filled with the sickening odour of the roasting flesh, the wretched man approached the fire, a bundle of fuel in his arms; but, powers of mercy, what a sight met his gaze! The body had been turned by the falling wood; the sinews had contracted, and altered its position.

It was on its knees. The hair and beard were burnt away, as well as the lips, revealing the grinning teeth. The head had fallen back, and the arm still remained pointing to heaven, as if the body, in the last moments of its existence, obeyed the latest desires of the immortal spirit it had clothed, and implored divine vengeance for blood spilt.

His nerves could stand the strain no longer, and the criminal fell to the ground in a fainting-fit before the dumb accuser.

Cane sprang up, and dragging Ralf a little on one side, muttered to himself—

"If it wasn't that you might be useful some o' them days, I'd shove you hon the coals halso—ten to one hif you don't let heverythink hout."

In an hour or two it was all over. Charred bones alone remained; and making a huge fire above them, which would continue to burn for some hours, they once more retraced their steps through the dismal forest, arriving at Cambaranga about half an hour before daylight.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BESSIE'S MARRIAGE—MUSTERING FOR NEW COUNTRY—THE HON. MR DESMARD.

On the return of the Betyammo party from Yering, Bessie's wedding took place without delay. The clergyman had accompanied them back, everything was in readiness, and the affair passed off quietly. There were many present; but most of them came the day before, and left immediately after the ceremony. Fitzgerald had returned just in time to be present, and rode over with John, who acted as groom's-man. Stone looked very well, with his honest, manly countenance, and robust, athletic figure, beside merry-faced Bessie, whose eyes sparkled like an April day.

Phœbe was of course the principal bride's-maid, and felt much at parting from her only sister,—the playmate of her childhood's days, and companion of her more advanced years. Mr Gray, with his kind, motherly wife, went about cheerily, as usual, and seemed to realise the fact that a son had at last been given to them; and Mrs Gray especially appeared not a little pleased as she contemplated her daughter's bearded protector.

It was, however, over at last. Mr and Mrs Stone took their seats in the buggy—for the ceremony had taken place in the morning early—and bidding good-bye to all, started on their wedding-trip to New South Wales, amid a shower of old boots and slippers.

Most of the guests left after lunch, among them

Fitzgerald and John, the latter of whom now had some busy work before him. The scene they have just witnessed has struck a chord which kept vibrating in Fitzgerald's breast; and as they ride home, he made a confession of his adventure in Sydney, and of his having at last fallen in love, in the most unexpected way.

"Most romantic," replied John. "I was not aware that so much sentiment existed in your nature."

"I daresay not," returned his friend. "I was not aware of it myself. I cannot account for it. I know absolutely nothing of the lady. I only saw her for a few minutes, and yet I cannot forget her. You know how I used to laugh at spoony fellows. Well, I can understand that now."

"But," urged John, "you don't know whether she is engaged or not. She may be unamiable—stupid."

"It's no use, West. You may be right, but I feel drawn to her. I believe in her. I can read a noble, constant faith in her high brow and steadfast eyes—truth and reverence in the Madonna-shaped head—sensibility in the delicate nostril—and child-like purity in the beautifully-formed lips and dimpled chin; while her air, figure, and conversation bespeak the cultured woman."

"Ah! it is plain you are in a hopeless way. Is it not strange," he questioned, rather musingly, "that all the charms and virtues you describe with such enthusiasm have been before your eyes for many a year, and that you failed to notice them when displayed to you, and yet invest with them a perfect stranger whose looks may belie her? It is not an uncommon circumstance."

"Whom do you speak of?" demanded Fitzgerald.

"I mean Phœbe Gray."

"Phœbe Gray!" echoed the squatter.

"Yes," said West. "You have not mentioned a beauty, or charm of mind or manner, which Miss Gray does not possess in a large degree. But it is ever the

same," he continued, speaking more to himself than the other. "We rarely appreciate sufficiently what we are familiar with; and as frequently as not, we go to the opposite extreme, and overestimate what we do not possess or know. You seem to have endowed this young lady with every virtue under the sun, after an hour's conversation."

"I am sure—that is, I think she has a gentle, charitable disposition."

"So has Phœbe Gray."

"She is refined in her tastes, sensible in her conversation, elegant in her manners."

"Phœbe Gray certainly has not had the advantage of mixing much with society; but as far as manners may be acquired without that, she is all you have described."

"She is witty and well read,—at least I think so, for she had me out of my depths before I knew where I was."

"My dear Fitz, go and talk to Miss Gray; she will open your eyes. You are blind. She does not indeed make a parade of knowledge, but few of her years have read so much or thought so deeply; and she is, besides, what your town beauty may not be—a clever, active little housewife, with a bright interest in the everyday affairs of life, a good devoted daughter, and a loving sister."

"I say, West," said Fitzgerald, abruptly turning round on him,—"I do believe you are struck."

"Yes, I am," replied John—"struck with admiration for her good, endearing qualities of mind and person; but not in love, if you mean that. I am not rich enough to allow myself to indulge in the luxury."

"Well, never mind, old fellow; who knows what the new country will do for you? You'll come down a rich squatter before long."

This conversation awakened Fitzgerald to a sense of the many excellences in Miss Gray's character, which

he had never before perceived; and often afterwards he thought, as he reflected on the truth of what John had said, it would be well for him if he could love her; but that, he felt, was impossible. The face with the brown hair, and soft dark eyes with the long lashes, haunted him.

Next day mustering commenced for the new country. A mixed mob of cattle—cows, steers, and heifers—had to be collected, to the number of one thousand head; and before the ensuing evening, the usual sound of discontented, reproachful, remonstrating, or angry bellows, came from the yard in which the nucleus of the herd about to be sent away were confined.

The stocking of new country afforded Fitzgerald an opportunity of eliminating from the general herd such members of it as were troublesome from one cause or another; and all cattle whose favourite feeding-grounds marched on the large scrubs, together with such as associated with the wild mobs, were condemned to recommence life under different auspices. All cattle, moreover, which, from their knowledge of the country, and their wild nature, made themselves leaders of the rest, were picked out and brought home to the yards. Thus his own herd became free of many animals which were an unceasing source of annoyance; while the long overland journey, and the daily supervision exercised over them in order to keep them upon their new pastures, together with the change in disposition which their constant contact with the men engaged in looking after them was sure to bring about, could not fail to be productive of the greatest good to the creatures so culled out. Many there were whose constitutions required change of pasture. Some were lean, and would never fatten upon the run to which they were accustomed. Others were so fat, that calves were not to be looked for from them; while a few were determined rovers on neighbouring stations.

Fitzgerald and John had ridden up to the house

after yarding their first draft for the north, and were preparing to partake of their evening meal, when the former, who happened to glance out of the window looking up the road, said quickly, "Come here, West; look at this fellow riding up. Keep back a little; don't let him observe you."

The new-comer was indeed an object worthy of observation, and both the young men mentally ejaculated the words, "New chum."

He was an extremely nice-looking young fellow, with a high-bred, intelligent face, shaved, with the exception of a fair moustache. His dress and horse, however, attracted attention, owing to the singularity of both. The steed was one whose great age was not less remarkable than his extreme leanness. He was, in fact, a mass of bones and long hair, but had doubtless, many years ago, been of indisputable gameness, which was evinced by the constant motion of the pointed ears surmounting the brave, wrinkled old head, and the undiminished fire of the bold eyes, above which were situated deep cavernous hollows. A single tusk stuck out, wild-boar fashion, on one side of the withered upper lip, whose fallen-in appearance betrayed the want of teeth in the poor old gums. Still his step, as he bowled up to the slip-panel, was brisk and energetic, though slightly tottering; and the stump of his docked tail stood up fiercely erect, bristling with short hair.

The dress of his rider betrayed something of the romantic imagination which colours the actions of so many new arrivals from Europe. A scarlet shirt and Garibaldi jacket, together with white breeches and Napoleon boots, and a helmet from which depended the gay ends of a silken pugaree, formed his costume. His waist was confined by a snake-skin belt sustaining innumerable snake-skin pouches; a revolver in its pouch was slung on the left hip, while a formidable silver-mounted bowie-knife with ivory handle depend-

ed by silver chains from the other. In addition to this, he carried in his hand a very fine-looking fowling-piece.

"By Jove, old fellow," muttered Fitzgerald, "you'll never be taken alive!"

Presently one of the station blackboys, who happened to be loitering about, entered with what perhaps had never been seen on Ungahrun before—viz., a visiting-card, on which was printed, "The Hon. Adolphus Maurice de la Chapelle Desmard."

"Oh, hold me up!" groaned the squatter, handing John the pasteboard, and going to the door, where, in spite of the grotesque attire, he could not help being favourably impressed with his visitor's gentlemanly bearing.

The new-comer's address was likewise good, although somewhat marred by a drawling form of speech.

"Ah—Mistah Fitzgewald—ah—I conclude."

"That is my name," said the squatter, bowing slightly.

"Ah—I—ah—heeah you are about—ah—sending some cattle northwards, and—ah—I came up—ah—to make some inquiries about them. The fact is—ah—I would—very much like to—ah—accompany them."

"I shall be most happy, Mr Desmard, to give you any information you require; but in the meantime, please to turn out your horse and come inside. We are just about sitting down to dinner."

The young man managed to unsaddle his old horse, though with considerable awkwardness, and turned him into the paddock, stroking his hog-maned neck, and patting his lean sides—the hair on which, from its length (the result of great poverty), bore a strong resemblance to fur—remarking,—

"Wonderful cweateah! Suhpwisingly intelligent! But—ah—I am inclined to think him—ah—aged."

"So am I," returned his host, smiling.

"He—ah—requires no looking after whatever;

nevah stways; always chooses the wivah-bed, or bed of a cweek—ah—to pasture in. He—ah—is vewy deah to me. He—ah—in fact, saved my life."

"Did he indeed!" said Fitzgerald, looking at the ancient one with more respect than he had at first exhibited. "Well, we'll find some more tender grass for him to-morrow than the paddock affords; meantime, bring your things inside."

This Mr Desmard did, having occasion to make two journeys in so doing. His valise was twice the size of an ordinary one, and many articles hung to his saddle, after the manner of his tribe. The old horse must indeed have been a game creature to struggle on under so heavy a burden.

In the course of dinner—which meal Mr Desmard sat down to in his accoutrements, considerably to the uneasiness of the other two, who were not at all fond of being in the neighbourhood of new chums' revolvers—he gave them a short account of himself and his intentions.

"My—ah—father is Lord Martlett. Perhaps you know the name."

Fitzgerald did not, but John recognised it as that of a popular, though by no means wealthy, peer in one of the adjoining counties to his own.

"Well—ah—when travelling by wail, my—ah—father met by accident a gentleman who—ah—descwibed himself as—ah—Mistah Bosterre, of Blowaway Downs, in Queensland; and my—ah—father, who is not a wich man, and—ah—has a numbah of—ah—childwen (I am the third—ah—son), was delighted to heeah of an opening in—ah—this country for a young man. He—ah—made some inquiwies, and—ah—found that—ah—Mr Bosterre was—ah—weally the—ah—man he wepwesented himself to be, and—ah—had him to Desmard Castle, wheah he was—ah—vewy kind indeed to him.

"The end of this—ah—was, that Mistah Bosterre

agweed—ah—to give me—ah—an appointment on his estate; and—ah—my father agweed to—ah—pay him a pwemium of—ah—thwee hundwed pounds for—ah—the first yeah.

"I—ah—do not know much of—ah—business, but I thought it would—ah—look better were the—ah—money paid quarterly; and—ah—I pwoposed this to my—ah—father, who at once agweed, as did—ah—Mistah Bosterre, after some—ah—objections.

"Well, when I awived at Blowaway Downs, I—ah—weally did not see how I was to—ah—make any money. I had—ah—to sit all day with—ah—Mrs Bosterre in the—ah—parlour, and be introduced by her to—ah—her visitors as—ah—the son of her—ah—'deah fwiend Lord Martlett;' or I had to wide into town with—ah—old Bosterre, and undergo the same.

"It was about this time that—ah—I became possessed of—ah—my horse. He is called Jacky-Jacky, after a celebwated bushwanger who—ah—owned him about thirty—ah—years ago; and—ah—although I have been led to doubt some—ah—at least of the statements which—ah—have been made to me, I understand—ah—from various quarters, that—ah—such is weally the case."

"I quite believe it also," said Fitzgerald.

"Ah, glad you say so. Bosterre sold him to me. Well—ah—I found my first quarter's pwemium was—ah—paid, and my second was begun; and—ah—I thought—ah—I would ask old Bosterre about—ah—my appointment, and—ah—he quite agweed with me about the—ah—necessity for work, and—ah—brought me down next morning to the ram-yard, and—ah—gave the rams into my chahge to—ah—look after. The cweateahs were engaged in—ah—knocking their heads together in—ah—the most painful way; and—ah—during my connection with them, which—ah—was only during one day, I may wemark, I—ah—found

that—ah—they wesorted to it—ah—as a wecweation when not particularly engaged—ah—otherwise.

"On weturning to the house I—ah—awdered the groom to—ah—saddle Jacky-Jacky, and I—ah—wode down and took my chahge away to the—ah—woods. We—ah—soon lost sight of—ah—habitations, and the solitude was dwedful. I began to—ah—wemember those unfortunates of whom—ah—I had wead as lost—ah—for ever. I looked awound; there was—ah—no watah. I had—ah—nothing to eat. There was—ah—no game to be seen, except—ah—a few small birds in the tops of—ah—a vewy high tree; but—ah—although I fired all my cahtwidges except one—ah—at them, I—ah—missed them. A wevolver is—ah—wather difficult to manage, when—ah—shooting at—ah—vewy small birds, I find."

"It is indeed," agreed the other two.

"I became alarmed. No—ah—watah; no—ah—food. Only one shot in my wevolver. I—ah—did not know where to turn. The sun was blazing—ah—hot. Was I—ah—going to pewish alone, with—ah—hungah and—ah—thirst? My thwoat got parched. I felt—ah—alweady the agonies of—ah—death. I determined to—ah—make one attempt to—ah—save my life. I wesolved to—ah—kill a ram, and—ah—dwink the blood of the cweateah. I—ah—dismounted and—ah—tied up Jacky-Jacky, and—ah—seeing one lying down not—ah—far off, which I had noticed in the course of the—ah—morning, from the gweat size of his—ah—horns, and his vewy woolly body, I appwoached cautiously, for I—ah—expected evewy moment that—ah—he would wish to examine the—ah—stwength of my head; but—ah—he merely wrinkled his nose and—ah—showed his teeth. I—ah—kept my eye upon him, and—ah—I put the ball wight in the—ah—middle of his forehead, upon which he—ah—turned over and—ah—died. Vewy simply, I assuah you. The west of my chahge—ah—scampered away,

but—ah—I could not follow them. I—ah—dwew my bowie-knife, and—ah—cutting off the hideous cweateah's—ah—head, I commenced drinking his blood; but—ah—stwange to say, I did not feel at all thirsty after the—ah—first mouthful. Indeed, I became—ah—quite ill, pwobably from the—ah—seveah mental stwain. I—ah—lay down for some time; and as it—ah—grew cooler, I wesolved to abandon myself to—ah—Jacky-Jacky's sagacity, who—ah—wonderful to relate, took me through—ah—paths known to himself, to—ah—the society of my fellow—ah—beings. But more singular still was—ah—the fact, that when I—ah—got home, the rams were—ah—home before me. And when—ah—I welated the story of my—ah—pewil to Mistah Bosterre, he was—ah—most unfeeling.

"He wushed away down to the—ah—yard, and on weturning he—ah—used the—ah—most fwightful language, and—ah—said that I—ah—had killed his imported Saxon ram—ah—Billy—who was—ah—worth two hundred—ah—pounds; and—ah—he indulged in—ah—so great an amount of—ah—critical licence, and—ah—depweciatory general wemark in weference to all—ah—late awivals, that I felt my—ah—self-wespect would not admit of my—ah—continuing to—ah—weside at Blowaway Downs; and hearing of your—ah—intended journey, I thought I would—ah—call upon you."

Bursts of laughter occasionally interrupted the speaker, and as his hearers looked at one another, again and again they exploded with merriment.

Neither liked Bosterre, who was a well-known character. Boastful, purse-proud, a toady, and a knave, he made a regular trade of entrapping "new chums," and getting premiums from them, and then suffering them to waste their time in idleness, and their means in folly.

With regard to the overland trip, Fitzgerald referred Desmard to John, who, having taken rather a fancy to the lad, agreed to his forming one of the travellers, promising him at the same time a remuneration equivalent to his services,—a proposal which much delighted the new hand, who had never known how to earn a shilling in his life.

Mustering now proceeded with steady vigour, and Desmard was allowed to gain experience in tailing[1] those already brought in, along with two old and experienced hands, who were much amused with their companion's eccentricities, and who never tired of relating his peculiar sayings.

A few evenings later, the news of old M'Duff's disappearance and rumoured murder struck astonishment and horror into the hearts of all in the district, which gradually increased as, step by step, suspicion fell, and eventually fixed itself firmly, upon Ralf and Cane. Many there were who remained incredulous to the last; but on hearing the report of Cane's having been seen in the neighbourhood, John felt a steady conviction of his guilt, while Fitzgerald was no less sure of Ralf's complicity—a belief which was also strongly shared in by the stockman, Tommy, who calmly remarked that he knew "all along Ralf was born to be hanged."

On the morning of the day after the burning of the body a blackfellow came in from the bush, and happening to see Ralf first, coolly addressed him with—

"I say, me been see-em two fellow whitefellow burn-em 'nother whitefellow lasnigh."[2]

"You *see* them?" utters Ralf, looking for nothing but immediate detection and arrest.

[1] Herding.

[2] "I saw two white men burning another one last night."

"Yohi, me see 'em; bail that fellow see me. Me sit down good way; me frighten; by-and-by me track 'em yarraman, that been come up here."[1]

"Look here," said Ralf, quickly, "bail you yabber 'nother whitefellow. Me want to man 'em that one two fellow whitefellow. By-and-by you and me look out."[2]

Giving the nigger some rations and tobacco, and enjoining further secrecy, Ralf made for Cane's retreat, and informed him.

"You —— fool, why didn't you bring the nigger 'ere? we might 'ave knocked 'im hover, hand made hall safe."

"No, no," said Ralf, decisively; "no more blood. By this time all his tribe know it. We can, perhaps, get away now if we start at once; but sooner than shed more blood, I'll stay and give myself up."

Cane could also see the futility of endeavouring to hold out longer against fate; and that night, after laying hands on whatever could be got of use to them in the house, the two disappeared, taking with them four of the best horses in the paddock.

A few days afterwards, police arrived from Yering, headed by Dowlan, who made himself very active in his investigations.

It was a simple matter to trace the horse-tracks from the lagoon to the fire. Blacks diving in the former brought up some of the dead man's effects, and the charred bones at the fire spoke for themselves.

This, with their flight, and the statement of one of the men, who swore that he saw Ralf and another

[1] "Yes; I saw them. They did not see me; I was a long way off. I was frightened. Afterwards I tracked their horses; they came up here."

[2] "Look here, don't tell any other white man; I want to catch those two white men. By-and-by you and I will search for them."

returning to the station some days previously, just before dawn, and the testimony of the blackfellow, formed a chain of circumstantial evidence which left no doubt in any one's mind as to the perpetrators of the deed, and a pursuit after them was at once instituted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OVERLAND WITH CATTLE—THE START—THE STAMPEDE.

At last the mustering was completed. The stores and rations necessary for the requirements of the journey, and the supplies for the new station during the first six months, were all packed upon a great bullock-dray, to be drawn by twelve huge oxen. The men had been hired. They were six in number, of whom one was a bullock-driver and another a cook. Two blackboys were also to be attached to the expedition, thus making the total number ten. They were, — John, in charge; Desmard; four drovers; a bullock-driver; a cook, and two blackboys.

As it was highly necessary to watch the cattle at night, the party were told off into regular watches, with the exception of the bullock-driver and cook, whose duties exempted them from this part of the work, and of the two natives, on whom little or no reliance could be placed, the temptation to sleep proving sometimes too strong for them. The night was thus divided into three watches of four hours each, each watch consisting of two men. Twenty-two horses had been shod, and were divided amongst the party, in the proportion of one each to the bullock-driver and cook, two night-horses, and two to each of the other members, with two spare ones.

Of the two native boys who were anxious to follow

John's fortunes for a time, one was about fifteen years of age, the other about fourteen. The eldest, "Blucher," was rather an uncivilised lad, not having been much in contact with whites, but of an energetic disposition. The other, whose appellation was "Gunpowder," was a gentle, quiet boy, with a mild face, large soft eyes, and curly hair. Blucher, indeed, had only made up his mind to go with the cattle a day or two before they started, owing to an altercation which had taken place between him and the Ungahrun cook. Native boys employed on a station are almost always fed by their master's hand, or from the kitchen. The employer cuts off a large slice of bread and beef, and pours out a liberal supply of tea; and the boy seats himself outside on the ground, very much more contented with this meal than if he had had the trouble of cooking it himself. This is often done to protect him from the rapacity of his friends, with whom he is bound by his tribal laws to divide his food, and partly to save the time they invariably waste in cooking.

The blackboys are quick at appreciating differences in the social scale, and a single look enables them to distinguish between a master and a mere whitefellow. It pleases them to have their food from their master's table, or cooked in the kitchen; and as they are throughout their lives mere children, they are much humoured, and their presence tolerated about the head-station buildings.

The kitchen-woman on Ungahrun had but a short temper, and the boys having been brought rather much forward during the mustering, through which they had been of the greatest service, got into the habit of walking into the kitchen for the purpose of lighting their pipes at the stove, notwithstanding that a large fire burnt under a boiler outside. To their minds, the fire inside the house gave a much sweeter taste to the pipe they loved.

Blucher, as usual, had marched into the room on the morning in question, coolly ignoring the remonstrances of the irritated woman, when her passion getting the better of her, she made a rush at him with the poker, which, perhaps, she had heated on purpose, and touched him on the bare leg—for, like all his race, when not on horseback he doffed his trousers and boots, and wore nothing but a Crimean shirt. The pain of the wound was as nothing to the indignity. With a bound he rushed into the "Cawbawn Humpy," his eyes flashing with insulted pride, exclaiming, "Missa Fitzgell, White Mary cook'em me," pointing to his leg.[1] Nor could Fitzgerald's remonstrances or condolences avail anything; Blucher tendered his services to John, who, finding that Fitzgerald did not object, exchanged him for another boy whom he had purposed taking.

Blacks are excitable to the last degree, extremely, fond of change and adventure, and, in their own way, brave enough. Blucher and Gunpowder, on the eve of their departure for a new country, where they would be certain to come in contact with *myalls*,[2] were looked upon as embyro heroes, and entertained their admiring tribal brethren with much boastful promise of future daring—indeed, so much enthusiasm sprang up in the tribe, that even the grey-headed old men assailed John to be allowed to accompany him.

The day of departure came, the gates of the herding-yard were thrown open, and Fitzgerald sitting on his horse on one side, with John opposite, counted out the squeezing, roaring, many-coloured crowd; and the number being ascertained, a start was effected. The men mounted, and the overland journey to the new home, nearly 600 miles away, commenced.

During his stay on Ungahrun, John had made two or three short trips with cattle, and the experience thus

[1] All white women are termed "White Marys" by the natives.
[2] Wild, uncivilised aboriginals—*jangalis*.

gained gave him much confidence. His measures were carefully weighed beforehand; and his knowing exactly how to meet any difficulty which might arise assisted greatly in making matters smooth and pleasant for all parties. The bullock-dray with the cook had started very early, and the driver was ordered to halt at a certain spot about thirteen miles distant, where John intended making his first camp. The usual travelling distance for cattle is from seven to nine miles per day; but being fresh, and not inclined to eat, they could have gone considerably farther. They march along evidently very much displeased with having their long-accustomed habits broken into.

On the run, when left to themselves, they feed the greater part of the night; now they have to learn to sleep during the cool dewy darkness, when the grass is sweetest, and march, march, march during the hot dusty day, picking up a scanty meal by the roadside, off what has probably been walked over by half-a-dozen mobs of sheep and cattle within the last fortnight. They dislike exceedingly feeding on ground over which sheep have grazed: they cannot bear the smell left behind them by those animals; it disgusts them; besides which, the sheep crowd together in great numbers, and tread down and destroy more than they eat. Now and then a roar breaks from one of the exiles, who remembers an old mate left behind, or perhaps two or three grown-up members of her family; or some hobbledehoy of a steer cannot forget his mother, or they think in concert of the sweet wattle-shaded gullies and rich pastures of Ungahrun, and bellow disconsolately a bovine version of "Home, sweet home." The men are disposed in a half-circle behind the cattle, at some distance from one another. The pace is very slow; and although for the first day or two they cannot well do their work on foot owing to the unsteadiness of the cattle, they allow full rein to their horses, who graze

contentedly as they walk behind the mob, managing to chew the grass almost as well with the bit in their mouths as without it.

The cattle will not camp in the middle of the day yet; and the men, who are old drovers, have taken care to provide some food with which they satisfy themselves, washing it down with cold water from the nearest water-hole. About four or five o'clock in the evening, they come in sight of the camp chosen for the night's resting-place. It is a pretty timbered ridge, covered with green grass. The bullock-dray is drawn up at a convenient spot, near which a large fire burns, its smoke curling away up among the dark-leaved trees. The bullock-driver and cook are busily engaged in erecting a couple of tents, the smaller of which is to be occupied by John and Desmard. The men are to share the other, and the immense tarpaulin which covers the bullock-dray with its load, and extends on each side of it propped up by forks, between them.

The deep-sounding bullock-bells jangle down in the creek, and the spare horses have been hobbled out, and feed all round. It is too early as yet to get into camp, for the cattle have walked unceasingly. In a few days they will be glad to graze, and then the arrival at camp can be timed properly. The feed here is good, but they will not look at it. They turn and march homewards in a body, on being left to themselves for a moment, and are continually brought back. A cooey from the cook announces supper, and half the men start for the camp to make a quiet meal before dark. This will probably be the worst night during the whole journey. The second half of the party are afterwards relieved by the first; and as they discuss the evening meal, they discuss also the likelihood of a quiet camp or a rush off it.

Cattle are very liable to be frightened off their camp during the first few nights on the road; and

when this occurs, a tremendous stampede, with serious consequences sometimes, takes place, and ever afterwards the cattle are on the watch to make a similar rush. This is more particularly the case with a mob of strong, rowdy bullocks; and some breeds of cattle are naturally wilder than others, and therefore more inclined to start.

The Ungahrun herd had a considerable strain of Hereford blood running through it, as any one might discover by the numerous red bodies and white faces; and the cattle, although very fine and large-framed, were characterised by the rather uneasy nature of that celebrated breed; besides which, the presence in the mob of the wildest animals on the run and a number of scrubbers might lead to a stampede at any moment, and on this account great precaution and vigilance were maintained.

Fires had been lighted at stated distances, in a circle large enough to permit the travelling herd to move about easily within it. Horses ridden during the day were exchanged for fresh ones, and the cattle were slowly driven into the centre of the fire-enclosed ring. Night comes on, but they think not of lying down. Incessantly moving, they keep up one continuous roar, and endeavour to walk off in every direction. All hands are busy keeping them back. The night is very dark, but one can see the forms moving out between the fires. When one goes another follows, and so on in a string. It takes the men all their time to keep them in.

West had just made his way from one fire to another, meeting Fitzgerald there, who had come from his sentry-duty between it and the fire beyond, and they have driven in the cattle as they came; but looking back again, they each see the determined brutes stringing out as fast as ever. They turn their horses, and with suppressed shouts force them back, and returning, meet once more to repeat the same

over again. Between almost every fire the same thing is going on.

The night is quite dark; the uproar is tremendous. One or two men have already mistaken their comrades' horses for stray cattle, and have called forth a volley of curses by using their whips.

"Way!" "Look back!" "Head on there!" "Come out o' that!" "Way woh!" "Look out!" are heard in all directions.

"I'll tell you what, West," says Fitzgerald, "you'll have to ring them. Pass the word round for all hands to follow one another in a circle, at a little distance apart."

This plan succeeded admirably. No sooner does a cunning beast try to make its way out after the sentry has passed, than another sentry, moving up in the circle, observes it, and is immediately followed by a third and fourth, and so on continually. The cattle ring also. They at last get tired of the continual motion and bellowing, and some lie down, but not for long. They are up again, and the same thing occurs once more. After about four hours they become a little quieter, and half the men are despatched to the camp to get some sleep, leaving the other half on duty. The watch who have turned in still keep their horses tied up in case of accident, and their comrades on duty are obliged to be very active; but a number of cattle are now lying down. About half-past two in the morning the first watch is called, and the rest obtain a short repose until a little before daybreak, when they are roused by the cook, who has been preparing breakfast during the last half-hour.

After the morning meal, they proceed to catch their respective nags from among the horses which have been brought up by Gunpowder, whose turn it is for that duty, and follow the cattle, which have been making the most vigorous efforts to leave the camp since the rising of the morning star. They head them

northwards, and once more the creatures are lining each side of the road in a long string. The rest of the men having finished their meal and changed their horses, follow them, leaving the bullock-driver and cook to bring up the rear with the baggage, and one of the blackboys to follow with the spare horses. The cattle are inclined to feed this morning; and about eleven o'clock the dray and horses come up and pass on ahead about a mile. The cook makes a fire, and has dinner ready by the time the cattle come up. Each one fills the quart he carries at his saddle-dee, and helps himself to bread and beef; and the dray starts on ahead for the appointed camping-place, arriving there about half-past two or three, when the preparations for the evening meal are again commenced. The cattle camp very much better the second night, and half of the men turn in immediately after supper. In a night or two the ordinary watch of two men will be quite sufficient. Fitzgerald takes leave of the party next morning, and returns, after shaking hands with John and cordially wishing him prosperity. Desmard is also made happy with an assurance that Jacky-Jacky shall be shifted on to the tenderest feed on the whole run.

And now John is in sole charge. Upon him depends the responsibility of the whole undertaking. Desmard's society is a great boon to him; for although he mixes freely and converses familiarly with his men to a certain extent, the maintenance of authority demands that he shall live apart from them; and without the young new chum he would have been very lonely in his camp. The weather is gloriously fine, as usual, and the travelling is quite a pleasure-trip. John rides on ahead, selects a suitable spot for a camp, examines the watering-places, and the cattle graze leisurely along.

Some of the men walk, leading their horses, in order to spare them as much as possible, the loosened

bits enabling them to browse as they follow behind the mob. Here a drover sits side-saddle fashion for the sake of ease, idly flicking at the grass tussocks with his long whip; there one snatches a few moments to read a page in a yellow-bound volume, lifting his head now and then to observe how his charge are getting on. The blackboy with the cattle has fastened his horse's rein to the stirrup-iron, and allows him to feed about, while he moves from tree to tree, his hand shading his upturned eyes as he scrutinises each branch in his search for the tiny bee which manufactures his adored *chewgah-bag;*[1] or with cat-like stealthiness, waddy in hand, cautiously stalks the unsuspecting kangaroo-rat or bandicoot.

The cattle have quietly selected their respective places in the line of march; a certain lot keep in front as leaders, and the wings, body, and tail are each made up of animals who will continue to occupy the same position all the way, unless compelled by sickness to change it. The sharp-sighted experienced drivers already know many of them by sight so accurately, as to be able to detect the absence from the herd of any portion of it. At sundown they draw quietly on to the camp, and are soon lying down peacefully, and the two men appointed for the first watch mount the night-horses, and allow all hands to get to supper. At ten o'clock they call West and Desmard.

John has taken the young man into the same watch with himself, partly to guard him against any practical joking which his simplicity may give rise to, and partly to supply any want of precaution, or remedy any inadvertent neglect occasioned by his inexperience.

They come out of the tent. All is dark night. The fire burns brightly, and throws a ruddy glow on the white tent. The dim outline of the bullock-dray, with its tarpaulin-covered load, looms against the

[1] Sugar-bag—the native pigeon-English word for honey.

dark background a little way off. The two black-boys, stripped naked, lie almost in the ashes of the fire; their clothes are scattered about; their new blankets, already spotted with grease, dirt, and ashes, are made use of by a couple of dogs who belong to the bullock-driver. Buckets, pots, and camp-ovens stand together in a cluster. Everything is hushed and quiet. As West and Desmard stand at the fire filling their pipes, they can detect dimly the extent of the great cattle-camp by the reflection of the various fires on the tops of the trees. How quiet the cattle are! not a breath is heard. The sound of the large variously-toned bullock-bells comes melodiously from where the workers are feeding half a mile away.

Now a horse's tread is heard, and the figure of a horse and his rider issues from the darkness into the bright firelight. The man dismounts. "All quiet?" asks John. "Yes," answers the watch; "not a stir out of them yet." Another watchman now rides up on the other side, his horse shying slightly as he nears the tent, and makes a similar report. John and Desmard mount, and make their way round the mob from fire to fire, until they meet on the other side. Some of the cattle are lying down, almost in the path, and they nearly stumble over them in the darkness.

"How—ah—vewy intewesting this is!" remarks Desmard; "quite—ah—womantic, keeping midnight watch. The—ah—deah cweateahs seem to have—ah—made up their minds to—ah—behave themselves."

"Yes," said John, "for a little; but in about half an hour's time you will find that it will take you all your time to keep them in the camp, and perhaps they may trouble us for nearly an hour, but will then settle down and (unless disturbed) remain perfectly quiet until morning. I chose this watch on that very account. About eleven o'clock every night they will rise, and move in the same manner all through the journey."

"How—ah—vewy singulah!"

It happened exactly as John had said. One by one the cattle rose and stretched themselves, until the whole camp became alive with a moving, bellowing, dusky crowd, incessantly endeavouring to straggle away. It required much vigilance and activity on the part of both West and Desmard to keep them together, and the latter proved himself a very efficient assistant.

At last the cattle began to settle once more. One by one they selected new sleeping-places, and, dropping first on their knees, they lazily sank down on the ground with a flop, emitting a loud sigh of content as they did so.

John had stationed himself on the side of the cattle nearest home, leaving the most easily guarded side to Desmard, and was congratulating himself at hearing the welcome sigh heaved all around him when——a sudden rush—a whirr—a tearing, crashing, roaring, thundering noise was heard; a confused whirl of dark forms swept before him, and the camp, so full of life a minute ago, is desolate. It was "a rush," a stampede.

Desperately he struck his horse with the spurs, and tore through the darkness after the flying mob, guided by the smashing roar ahead of him. Several times he came violently into collision with saplings and branches, and at last, in crossing a creek, he fell headlong with his horse in a water-worn gully, out of which he managed to extricate himself, happily without having sustained any injury. But not so with the horse—the creature groaned and struggled, but could not rise.

Undoing the bridle, John climbs out again and listens. The noise of the retreating mob can still be heard in the distance, and he thinks he can also distinguish shouts. Horses are grazing near; and hastily catching the first he came to, he jumped on its back,

and had proceeded nearly a hundred yards before he recollected that he had forgotten to remove the hobbles.

In remedying his mistake, he now observes that the animal which he has chosen is the most noted buck-jumper in the mob—one that few would venture to ride saddled, but not one barebacked. He does not give the matter a second thought, however, so intent is he on pursuing the cattle. He flies along, urging the creature with the hobbles in his hand. He does not know where he is going, but keeps straight ahead on chance, and at last has the satisfaction of hearing the bellowing once more in the distance. He gallops up and finds that one of the men, mounted on Desmard's horse, has managed to stop the break-aways. Presently another man and Blucher ride up. They watch the cattle together until morning, for the animals are terrified and ready to stampede again.

CHAPTER XXX.

ON THE ROAD—ABORIGINAL INNOCENTS—A WET NIGHT ON WATCH—DODGING COWS.

By daylight the rest of the men came up, and the cattle were driven back, and once more started along the road. As they returned to camp broken saplings and branches attest the force of last night's flight, and some of the cattle appear more or less disabled. It had been most fortunate that they were stopped so quickly, for in a short time they would have split up in many directions, and the mustering of them afresh would have caused much delay.

At breakfast John asked Desmard if anything had occurred on his side of the camp to start the mob.

"Well—ah—no," said he. "I weally am ignorant of any cause. Just—ah—before they went, all was—ah—quiet. One—ah—pooh cweateah neah me lay down and—ah—uttered a most heart-wending sigh. She—ah—seemed most—ah—unhappy, so I—ah—dismounted, and—ah—walked up to her, and—ah—she weally was most ungwateful, she—ah—actually wushed at me, and—ah—vewy neahly caught me, and then—ah—something fwightened the rest, and—ah—some one took my horse."

The men roared while John explained to the well-meaning cause of the trouble, that the cattle being totally unused to the sight of a man on foot at night, his near approach to them had caused the alarm; and, indeed, quieter cattle might have objected to his richly coloured garments.

West's horse lay where he fell. His neck was broken.

They are now on the direct track of travelling mobs of cattle and sheep, on their way to stock new country. They camp each night where some other mob have rested the night before them. The stations they pass are mostly worked by bachelors. The roughness of their surroundings indicates the want of feminine influence.

Blacks are being allowed in for the first time at one station they pass, and some of the young men employed on it amuse themselves in a good-humoured way with the unsophisticated aboriginals, to whom everything is perfectly new and strange. The natives especially admire the short-cropped hair of the white man, and make signs expressive of the ardent desire they possess to wear their own in a similar fashion. They have never seen a pair of shears, and shriek with childish joy on noting the rapidity with which an amateur barber, holding his patient at arm's-length, crops his long curly hair to the bone, tastefully leaving a high ridge from the forehead to the neck, after the fashion of a cock's-comb. All must be shorn in turn, and ingenuity is taxed to multiply new and startling fashions. Another begs to be allowed to fire off a gun, and receives an overloaded one, the result being a sudden upset, and an increased reverence for the white man's strength. A bottle of scent is held to the nose of a wild-looking fellow who has just been christened by the name of "Bloody-bones," of which he is immensely proud. He cannot endure the smell, and turns away, expressing his disgust by holding his nose and imitating sickness. One pertinacious blackfellow insists upon being permitted to smoke, and is handed a pipe in which has been artfully concealed below the tobacco a thimbleful of gunpowder, occasioning of course an explosion as soon as the fire reaches it, to the surprise of the savage, who thinks himself shot.

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the rush, became very marked. He grew more useful and practical every day.

Sometimes men from the camps ahead or behind stayed all night at West's, when looking for stray cattle or horses.

One evening a blackfellow rode up. He wore neither hat nor boots, and his wild look, and inability to speak English, denoted that he was a *myall* of one of the tribes lately let in at the stations they had just passed, who had been induced to accompany some travelling mob, the owner of which had not been able to procure a boy when farther south.

Desmard happened to be alone at the camp, the rest being all engaged elsewhere. The grotesque-looking savage jogged up, all legs and wings, and dismounting pointed to his horse with the words—

"Gobble-Gobble——"

"Gobble—ah—Gobble?" interrogated Desmard.

The nigger nodded his head with its shock of tangled curls, and grinned, showing a set of strong white teeth, like a dog's.

"You are—ah—hungwy, I suppose?" said the white man, producing a large plate full of bread and beef, which the sable stockman soon disposed of, and rising, once more uttered the words—

"Gobble—Gobble, Gobble—Gobble——"

"Gobble—ah—Gobble?" repeated Desmard, with surprise.

The blackfellow nodded.

Desmard returned to the dray, and produced an additional supply, which was also despatched.

Once more the savage grinned and pointed to his horse.

"Gobble, Gobble."

"Gobble—ah—Gobble," again repeated Desmard reflectively, offering more food, which the blackfellow lovingly looked at but rejected, pointing to his distended stomach.

Horse-exercise is also greatly sought after, and one powerful middle-aged man entreats so persistently in his own language, and by signs, that the favour is granted. An old race-horse with a peculiarly hard mouth and spirited action is tied up hard by. A brilliant idea enters the head of a genius who is plagued beyond endurance by the would-be cavalier. He unsaddles "old Chorister," and undoes the throat-lash, so that should the horse get away the bridle may be easily rubbed off by him. The grizzly warrior is assisted to mount. The reins are put in his hands, but he prefers clutching the mane. One—two—three—off! The old hurdle-horse receives a cut across the rump, and perhaps remembering past triumphs on the turf, he makes a start which would have done credit to his most youthful days. Unguided, he gets in among some broken gullies, and clears each in gallant style, the black man sitting like a bronze statue. In an instant he is out of sight, leaving the tribe in a whirl of admiration at his rapid disappearance, and the whites convulsed with laughter at the old fellow's surprise, and monkey-like seat. By-and-by the rider comes back on foot, bridle in hand, shaking his head, and saying, "Tumbel down." He is offered another mount, but declines for the present.

Day after day the routine of work was unchanged. Sometimes the pasture over which they travelled was very bare, and the water bad and scarce. Dead animals were passed every mile or two. Most of the ordinary operations of life had to be got over under difficulties. When the beef ran short, a beast had to be shot on the camp, and salted on the ground, its own hide doing duty as the salting-table.

Every alternate Sunday, when the state of grass and water permitted, the cattle were halted, and clothes were washed. All hands had got thoroughly into the work, and the change for the better in Desmard, who had discarded his gorgeous apparel after the night of

the rush, became very marked. He grew more useful and practical every day.

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"Gobble—ah—Gobble—singulah—but vewy—ah—suggestive. I—ah—rejoice Jacky-Jacky is not heah."

The blackfellow now put his feet together, and jumped about imitating the action of a hobbled horse, upon which light at once dawned on the Englishman, who provided the delighted *myall* with the articles in question. He had, it turned out, been sent by his master to look for a stray horse, and had been ordered to borrow hobbles at every camp he stayed at, they being scarce at his own.

Desmard began to acquire habits of observation about this time, and among other things, by watching the cook, he discovered the art of making a damper. This interested him greatly, and he confessed to the "doctor" the ill success of his own first attempt in the baking line, the night before he arrived at Ungahrun.

"I—ah—had camped out for—ah—the first time, in order to—ah—inuah myself to—ah—hardship, and—ah—wished to make a damper—which I—ah—heard was most—ah—delicious. I—ah—made a large fire, and—ah—mixed up the—ah—flour with some—ah—watah in a quart-pot, and—ah—after stirring it, I—ah—made a hole in the—ah—ashes, and I—ah—poured in the mixture, but—ah—though I was nearly blinded, I—ah—covered it up, and—ah—waited, and—ah—waited,—but vewy singulah to say, when I—ah—looked for the damper, it was—ah—not there; but I see now that I—ah—went the wrong way to—ah—work."

Shortly after this the travellers experienced a change in the weather. Frequent thunderstorms came on, and lasted all night, occasionally continuing during the day also. It was a most miserable time. The wretched cattle kept moving about on the puddled-up, muddy camp, bellowing out their discontent, and desire for higher and drier quarters, their unhappiness being only exceeded by that of the drovers. The watch,

clothed in oilskins, or with blankets tied round their necks, splashed and bogged their way around the restless brutes, who constantly endeavoured to steal away on the dark nights, the broad lightning glare alone revealing the fact to the much harassed sentries. Unceasingly, unmercilessly, down poured the heavy rain. The men on watch get wet through almost at once, and sit shivering on their shivering horses. Every five minutes they bend their legs to allow the water to run out of their long boots.

How they long for the slow hours to pass, so that they may get under the shelter of the friendly tarpaulin! At last the hour arrives, but there is no time to stand at the fire as usual this night. Indeed there is none to stand by. It went out long ago. One of them shouts out to the next men for duty, and hurries back to assist in looking after the barely manageable crowd.

The relief now turn out of their blankets and look outside. Everything black, a steady downpour of rain. Everything dripping,—the very ground under their feet oozes out water. They light their pipes hastily, and fasten their blankets around their necks. Splash, —splash,—splash,—a horse comes up, and one of the watch dismounts.

"How are they behaving?"

"Bad. You've got your work before you," answers the other.

"Whereabout is the camp? they seem to be roaring everywhere. I'm blowed if I can see a yard in front of me."

"As soon as you get clear of the dray, stop a moment, and the lightning will show you."

No. 2 rides off, cursing the day he took to cattle-droving, and No. 1 turns in, dripping wet, boots and all, like a trooper's horse (his other clothes were soaked the day before). Still he is under cover, which he feels to be a mercy. His comrade is relieved in

like manner, and follows his example, and before long they are both sound asleep.

Daylight breaks upon an equally wretched state of affairs. The blackboys have indeed managed to light a fire in a neighbouring hollow tree, and the cook has with difficulty boiled doughboys, which, although tough and indigestible, are nevertheless hot, and are washed down with pannikins of steaming tea.

There is, however, no time to dry the soaking clothes. The blankets, wet and muddy, are rolled up in a hasty bundle and tossed on the dray. By-and-by, when the sun comes out, the blowflies will deposit their disgusting eggs upon them, which the heat will hatch. The trembling horses, whose hanging heads and drooping under-lips and ears bespeak their abject misery, are saddled. Many of them suffer from bad saddle-galls, which are rendered excruciatingly tender by the constant wet, and in spite of every care they bend in acute agony under the weight of their riders as they are mounted.

A few cows have calved since they started, but the number increases as the calving season approaches, and causes much trouble, labour, and loss.

As it is impossible for the young things to follow their mothers, they are knocked on the head as soon as observed, but the mothers insist upon returning to their dead offspring. They are sent for each day, and are driven after the advancing mob, merely to steal back again on the first opportunity. Many of them make back, and are recovered two or three times before they cease to think of their young ones. Various expedients are adopted to obviate this, but all fail. An old hand, however, whose life has been spent on the road, has recourse to a plan which he confidently affirms he never knew to fail, if properly carried out. He watches until a calf is dropped, and after allowing the mother to lick it for a short time, causes her to be driven away. Then killing the little creature, he skins it carefully; and turning the skin

inside out, so as to prevent it coming in contact with anything which can alter its smell, he ties it behind his saddle.

On coming into camp at night, the skin is stuffed hastily, and laid at the foot of a tree. The mother is brought up quietly. She is thinking of her little one. She sees the dummy. She stops, and gazes. "Moo-oo-oo." She advances: it is like her own. She smells it: it is the smell. She licks it: it *is* her very own. She utters a tender "moo-oo-oo," and contentedly stands guard over the stuffed hide, to the intense satisfaction and joy of Blucher and Gunpowder, upon whom most of the trouble of tracking and recovering the mothers of former calves has fallen.

"My word," says Blucher, in an ecstasy of sly merriment to the old drover, as he watches the fond and deceived parent lick the semblance of her young one—"cawbawn you and me gammon old woman."[1] And indeed it is a blessing that she stays, for the constant fetching back of the straying cows is telling severely upon the jaded horses.

The plan is adopted, and succeeds in every case, saving a world of trouble; and every night two or three cows may be seen watching as many calfskins, while the drowsy watchman sits nodding on a log by the fire.

Day by day they continue their weary pilgrimage. Sometimes they follow the banks of a clear running stream, in whose limpid waters the travel-worn animals stand drinking, as if they would drain its fountains dry. Sometimes they wend their toiling path over rugged ranges, grinding down the shell of their tired hoofs on the sharp-cornered pebbles and granite grit. At times they feed on the luscious herbage and luxuriant blue-grasses of a limestone country, and anon they make the most of the kangaroo-grasses of the poorer sandy lands: but onward still they march for their new home in the "never, never" country.

[1] "You and I deceived the old cow beautifully."

CHAPTER XXXI.

FORMING A STATION—TRIALS AND TROUBLES OF A PIONEER.

ABOUT this time John received a batch of letters from the south, by a gentleman who was travelling out to a station lately taken up by him, and who had kindly undertaken the duty of mailman *en passant*, no postal arrangement having been as yet made for this unsettled part of the country.

Among others is one from Fitzgerald, detailing various items of local news, intermixed with business matters. Nothing further had been heard of Ralf or his fellow-criminal Cane, and the pursuit had apparently been given up. It was conjectured that they would endeavour to make their way down to New South Wales, and perhaps join some of the various bushrangers who were infesting the goldfields of that colony.

Cosgrove senior had taken the matter very much to heart, and had gone to Sydney, after appointing a new superintendent to manage Cambaranga, and it was supposed that he would return to England. Stone and his father-in-law, Mr Gray, had changed their minds about sending out stock to the new country at present, and would in all probability wait until after the wet season had passed by. Stone and Bessie were enjoying the delights of Sydney. All were well at Ungahrun and at Betyammo.

In a postscript Fitzgerald added that his endeavours to find out further particulars about Miss Bou-

verie had proved unavailing: all he could learn was that she had accompanied Mr and Mrs Berkeley to Melbourne, and no one knew when they purposed returning.

One letter, from the smallness of its size, escaped his notice until he had finished with the others. To his surprise it was addressed in the handwriting of a lady; and hastily tearing it open to learn the signature, he was no less surprised than enchanted to read the words, "Your affectionate friend Ruth."

She still remembered him, then; and with affection! He was so much pleased with the thought, that some time elapsed before he read his much-longed-for letter. It was dated Sydney, and commenced as follows:—

"MY DEAR MR JOHN,—You will no doubt be surprised at receiving a letter from me dated as above. We arrived here about a month ago, and I only discovered your address within the last few days from Mr Cosgrove's Sydney agent, Mr Bond, a very nice man. I do hope you will answer this letter. I am afraid you did not receive the letters which I continued to write to you for some time after your departure, because I never received any in return."

Indeed Ralf had taken care that she should not do so; for, hating the intimacy which he saw existing between John and his half-sister, as he called her —an intimacy which his mind and habits rendered him utterly incapable of participating in—he made it his business to intercept and destroy the few letters which John had written, managing, at the same time, to possess himself of Ruth's correspondence, which suffered a similar fate.

The letter went on to say how sorry she had been to learn that he had left Mr Cosgrove's station, for her step-father spoke of his ingratitude with much

bitterness; and although she could not believe him ungrateful, perhaps, if he made her aware of the circumstances, she might mediate, and put things once more in proper train.

She recalled the days of their past lives with much affectionate remembrance; and the whole letter breathed a warm sympathy which, considering the length of time that had elapsed since they last saw each other, awoke many a cherished feeling in John's breast, and he read and re-read it until he could have repeated it word for word; and on the very first opportunity he wrote a long letter in return, detailing all that had happened to him,—how his letters had remained unanswered, and how his memory of her was as fresh this day as when he last saw her. He could not bear to mention Ralf's name, however; for he knew that by this time she must have learnt the dreadful story, which would have the effect of publishing his crime throughout the land.

Desmard had also a numerous batch of letters, both colonial and English—one of the former containing an advantageous proposal to join, in taking up "new country," a squatter who was under an obligation to the young man's father, and who had only lately learnt of his being in the colony.

The country about them now presented daily evidences of its unsettled state. The travellers pass camps of sheep and cattle spelling on patches of good grass to recruit, or waiting for supplies to proceed further. Every one carried a revolver or carbine. Stories of attacks by blacks—many of them greatly exaggerated—are rife; and the talk is all of taking up and securing country. Rumours fly about fine tracts of hitherto unknown land, of immense areas of downs, and splendid rivers still farther out, and so on. Empty drays pass downwards on the road to port for supplies. Occasionally a yellow fever-stricken individual pursues his way south to recruit, or is seen doing his "shivers"

under some bullock-dray camped beside the road. At length they come to the commencement of the fine country discovered by Stone and his companions, and arrive at the camp of Mr Byng, the gentleman who sold to Fitzgerald the tract of land they intend settling on. Byng himself has brought out stock, and has settled on a portion which became his by lot. It is the very farthest spot of ground occupied by white men.

The cattle are now halted, and left nominally under the charge of Desmard; while Byng rides ahead with John to point out to him the country, and the best road to it. Blucher accompanies them, and greatly amuses his master by the excessive sanguinariness of his disposition. They cross the fresh tracks of blacks frequently, and each time Blucher begs that they may be attacked. John, who is by no means of a blood-thirsty nature, and rather shudders at the idea of a possible encounter with the savages, endeavours to explain that, when no aggression has taken place, the natives must be left alone; but Blucher cannot see things in that light.

"That fellow—rogue, cawbawn no good," he urges.

"What for you yabber (talk) like it that?" asked John. "Bail (not) that fellow been try to kill you and me."

"Nebber mind," returned the savage youth, his eyes nearly starting out of his head. "Come on; me want to chewt (shoot) him cawbawn (much)."

This amiable desire not being gratified, Blucher would fall back sulkily, evidently setting down John's refusal to a dread of the aboriginals.

They pushed their way over the lovely country which Stone had undergone so much to discover, passing through part of the run about to be stocked by him and Mr Gray; and in about seventy miles they "made" a mountain, from the top of which Byng pointed out, in a general way, the boundaries of that portion of the wilderness which they had come so far

to subdue. It was by no means as fine a country as that which they had lately passed over, but seemed well grassed and watered, and was darkly clothed with heavy masses of timber.

John's heart beat high as he silently gazed on the vast territory over which he was to rule as absolute monarch. The future lay wrapped in impenetrable mystery; but whether success or misfortune should be the ultimate result of his labours, of one thing he was determined — no efforts on his part should be wanting to promote a favourable termination to the undertaking.

On returning to camp the march was once more resumed; and at last our hero had the satisfaction of knowing that his nomadic life was at an end for a period. The cattle, although poor and weary, had on the whole made an excellent journey, and the deaths were by no means numerous. John's troubles, however, had only begun. He had calculated on securing the services of some of the men who had driven up the cattle in putting up huts, making a small yard, and in looking after the stock. This he found them ready enough to do, but at such an exorbitant price that no arrangement could be come to. They organised a small trades-union of their own, and united in making demands which West felt, in justice to his partner, he could not accede to. He offered higher wages than were given by any one of the squatters whose stations they had passed. No; they would accept nothing less than what they demanded.

They were well aware that he was alone with his two blackboys—for Desmard had announced his intention of going south. The two boys were not to be depended on, and might bolt home to their tribe the moment the thought entered their heads. Upwards of a thousand head of cattle had to be looked after on a new run in a country infested by wild blacks, the very smell of whom crossing the animals' feeding-

ground might stampede them. The wet season was almost at hand, and a hundred little things had to be attended to, the neglect of which might result in serious loss, and danger to life. But they stuck to their decision, and rode off in a body,—for John had resolved to perish rather than to submit to their extortionate demands.

In this strait Desmard's manly generous disposition showed itself. He flew from one to another, arguing, persuading, and upbraiding by turns, but in vain; and finally, relinquishing his own intended journey, he made known to John his intention of sticking to him until the end of the wet season should bring fresh men in search of employment. It was useless that the departing drovers reminded him that a long stretch of unoccupied country lay between him and the nearest habitation, and that in their company he might traverse it in safety: he merely turned his back contemptuously on the speakers, muttering to himself—

"I—ah—would not be seen in—ah—the company of—ah—such a set of native dogs."

So they went away, and John grasped, with gratitude in his heart, the hand of the brave young fellow, whose faithful, honest help was, notwithstanding his inexperience, invaluable at such a time.

Not a moment could now be lost. Everything depended on themselves, for a large river and several wide creeks, which, in a short time, would be flowing deep and rapid, intervened between them and Byng's station. The cattle were turned loose on some fine grass in the space formed by the junction of two large creeks, and all hands set to work to build a bark-hut. This had to be done during the hours which could be spared from looking after the cattle. Each morning, by daylight, the horses were brought up, and all hands went round the farthest tracks made by the scattered herd.

Desmard was on these occasions always accompanied by one of the boys, for John feared that he might get bushed; but he himself, and the other boy, went separately.

The creatures were inclined, on the whole, to stay, and chose out two or three shady camps to which they nearly all resorted as the sun became strong. On these camps it was their custom to lie until about four in the afternoon, when they would gradually draw off in all directions, feeding through the entire night. Many calved about this time, and such as did so usually "took" to the vicinity of the place where the calves were dropped. Some of the leaders, however, caused much anxiety and trouble, owing to their determination to make back to Cambaranga, and a strict look-out had to be kept that they did not get away unobserved. Day by day the cattle on the camps were gone through, and absent ones noted and searched for until found. In this duty the blackboys were simply invaluable; and their interest in the work, and untiring skill in tracking, contributed chiefly to the success which attended the pioneers in keeping the herd together. No sooner did a mob of cattle make a start, than some one in going round the "outside tracks" was sure to discover the fact, and instant pursuit never failed to result in the return of the deserters. The horses gave less trouble, and contentedly stuck to a well-grassed flat near the camp.

The departure of his men gave John no time to seek a suitable situation for a head-station, and the approaching wet weather warned him to make hasty preparations against it. His tents had been destroyed by a fire which took place some time before, during his absence from the camp, owing to the carelessness of the cook in not burning the grass around his galley. The tarpaulin was needed for the stores, and he was therefore under the necessity of building a hut. Setting to work with Desmard, he soon had the frame up,

while the boys endeavoured to cut bark. This latter proved to be a peculiarly difficult job, owing to the season of the year. When the ground is full of moisture, the trees are also full of sap, and most kinds of bark come off easily; but in dry or frosty weather, when the sap is in the ground, the very opposite is the case. The method of stripping bark is as follows: A straight-barrelled trunk is selected, and a ring cut round it near the ground, and another about six feet higher up. A long cut is then made perpendicularly, joining the two rings, and the edge of it is prised up with the tomahawk, until a grasp of the bark can be got with the hand. If inclined to come off, the whole sheet strips with a pleasant tearing sound, and is laid flat on the ground to dry, with a log as a weight above it. In two or three days the sheet becomes somewhat contracted in size, but lighter and tougher, and thoroughly impervious to moisture. It is used in many ways. It makes a capital roof, and for temporary walls of huts it is excellent. Bunks to sleep on, tables, and other articles of furniture, are improvised from it, and, on a new station, nothing is more useful.

Owing to the long dry season, the boys found bark-stripping exceedingly arduous work; and after exhausting all the artifices used by natives in the task, barely enough was secured to cover in the roof of the little hut. One gable-end was shut up by a portion of a partly-destroyed tent, the other by a couple of raw hides tied up across it. The walls were of saplings, stuck into the ground side by side, and confined against the wall-plate by another long straight sapling. When finished, the little hut was certainly not much to look at, but the builders congratulated each other on having a roof of some sort over their heads; and in the not improbable event of an attack by blacks, it would prove a shelter in some degree. With this object in view, and to prevent their movements inside being detected through the interstices of the

saplings by the sharp eyes of the prowling savages, all the spare bags and pieces of old blanketing which could be procured were fastened around the walls.

They had barely completed this apology for a dwelling when the tropical rain commenced, apparently timing its arrival to a day. Down it poured, in one continuous deluge, for hours. It was almost invariably heralded by thunderstorms, and beginning in the afternoon, lasted till evening. This permitted them for a couple of weeks to make their usual grand tour around the cattle; but as the rains extended their period of duration, the ground became exceedingly boggy, and the cattle were, perforce, obliged to remain about the sound sandy country on which their instinct led them to select their camps.

During the short intervals of hot, steaming, fine weather, the pioneers would endeavour to go through the herd; but the undertaking was toilsome and severe. Plodding on foot through the heavy black soil or soft boggy country, from one hard sandy tract to another, — for in such places riding was out of the question,—they would lead the plunging, sweating horses along a few steps at a time. Water lay in great lagoons over the surface of the country, covered with flocks of duck and ibis. The grass grew rank and long, and sorely impeded their movements. It was, moreover, by no means a pleasant reflection that, should they, when thus singly toiling through these swampy bogs, drop across a party of aboriginals (than which nothing was more likely), certain death would ensue, bringing with it disaster upon the rest of the little party.

As it was utterly impossible to muster and make a count of the cattle, John was obliged to content himself with paying occasional visits to them; but notwithstanding that a marked improvement was visible in the condition of those he saw, the anxiety told heavily upon him.

Apart from the miseries of mosquitoes, sand-flies, and blight-flies, the little community passed their spare time pleasantly together; and Desmard manufactured a chessboard of a piece of bark, marking its squares with charcoal, and he and John fought many a good fight on it with their primitive-looking men. John also took much pains to instruct his friend in the art of cutting out and plaiting stock-whips from the salted hides,—an accomplishment which the latter picked up rapidly, besides acquiring much other practical knowledge; and he was afterwards accustomed to say, that the necessity for exertion brought about during his pioneering with John, and the self-reliance thus gained, had made a different man of him.

Game was on the whole scarce. Plain turkeys and ducks were numerous, but the kangaroos had been kept under by the aboriginals, whose old camps lay thick around the hut. It certainly surprised the white men that the natives never made their appearance openly. Sometimes Blucher or Gunpowder would detect their tracks in the neighbourhood of the hut, but as yet they probably entertained a superstitious awe of the owners of so many huge horned animals.

The rain continued to deluge the flat country about the little head-station, and the creeks began to overflow their banks. The wet soaked up through the floor of their abode. The walls were covered with a green slimy fur. Even the inside of the gun-barrels, cleaned the night before, took on this kind of rust. Percussion-caps and priming had to be renewed every day. Minor trials and discomforts were also not wanting. The close, damp weather, causing the flour to heat, bred in it innumerable weevils; and the supply of tea and sugar failing (much having been destroyed by wet), the party had to depend chiefly upon the everlasting salt junk, eked out with what they could shoot. At last fever began to make its unwelcome appearance, and John, whose mind was most har-

assed, became the first victim. No proper medicine being to hand or procurable, he accordingly suffered much.

It was miserable at this time to look out of doors at night. Far and wide nothing could be seen in the bleak clouded moonlight but water, through which the grass stalks reared their dismal heads in the most melancholy manner, and a dark mass of trees occupied the background. The croak, croak of the frogs was sometimes broken by the distant bellow of a beast as it called to its fellows.

The occupants of this little outpost of civilisation were indeed isolated from all others. For countless miles to the north none of their race intervened between them and the Indian Ocean. To the west a still more dreary and still wider expanse of unknown territory ran. To the east, a *bêche-de-mer* station or two along the coast alone broke the otherwise inhospitable character of the shore. Southwards, for nearly three hundred miles, the blacks were still kept out like wild beasts; and their nearest neighbours, seventy miles away, were not in a much more enviable plight than themselves.

The incessant rains now caused the floods to increase, and gradually the backwater approached the little dwelling. The bullock-dray had sunk so deep in the soft soil that there was no hope of shifting it until fine weather came, and in any case the working bullocks could not have been mustered. Nearer and nearer rose the water. The country behind them for several miles was perfectly level. Rations were stowed away on the rafters, and preparations made to strengthen the little hut, when fortunately the waters subsided.

Day by day John's fever increased, and matters began to look very gloomy, when a change in the weather took place. It became possible to move

about, and the cattle were found to be all right. One or two men pushed their way out in search of employment, and were at once engaged. Medicine was procured, and John speedily improved as his spirits rose. The blackboys, who had undergone suffering and privation in the most cheerful manner during the wet season, now revelled in sunshine, and their camp-fire at night resounded with hilarious laughter or never-ending *corroborrees*. The horses had grown fat, notwithstanding the attacks of their enemies the flies, and now kicked like Jeshurun when ridden. Numbers of young calves could also be seen in every mob of cattle, necessitating the erection of a branding-yard. Rations were borrowed, pending the arrival of supplies ordered previously, and soon neighbours began to settle around, and a travelling mob or two passed by. Desmard took his leave of John with much regret on both sides, their acquaintance having ripened into firm friendship, and started on their southern journey. A proper site for a head-station was decided on, and before long a small though comfortable little cottage sheltered our hero, while a small stock-yard and paddock afforded convenience in working the run.

About three months after the close of the wet weather, Stone arrived on his country, bringing with him upwards of 10,000 sheep. He was accompanied by Bessie, who could not be prevailed upon to stay behind. They travelled much in the same manner as did John with his cattle, but not having the same necessity for economy, they were provided with many little luxuries and conveniences, which rendered the journey more endurable.

The sheep camped in a body at night, and at daylight were divided roughly into mobs of about 1500, which were driven along the road by the shepherds. Much annoyance was sometimes caused by the unaccountable stupidity of a few of the drovers, who never

failed to take the wrong road when such an opportunity presented itself. Others distinguished themselves by dropping mobs of sheep in the long grass, many animals being thus irretrievably lost. On the whole, however, the quietness which characterised the camp at night compensated for the labours of the day. Bessie's light-hearted gaiety and continual good-humour made all around her happy, and she bore the hardships of the first few months in her new home most uncomplainingly. Much had to be effected. Yards and huts had to be built for the sheep and shepherds. A head-station had to be erected. Supplies were wanted, and had to be brought up, and a paddock was also necessary. Preparations for the various lambings were urgent, and arrangements for shearing had to be considered. It was no easy time. A scarcity of labour was constantly followed by a demand for increased wages. The positions of master and servant became often inverted, and the latter sometimes gratified his malice by taking his departure when his services were most required.

John had a busy time likewise. The facility of moving about offered to them by the fine weather induced his cattle to stray. Hunting-parties of aboriginals crossed their feeding-grounds, causing some of the mobs to start and leave the run, and occasionally a few spears were thrown at the frightened animals.

John would willingly have paid several beasts yearly to the original possessors of his country, were it possible by such means to purchase their goodwill; for the damage done by a few blacks walking across their pasture can scarcely be appreciated by those who are unacquainted with the natural habits of cattle. Negotiations, however, would have been fruitless, and watchfulness was his only remedy. A single start sufficed to make the creatures alarmed and suspicious

for weeks. Continually on the look-out for their enemies, they took fright and rushed for miles without stopping, on the occurrence of the slightest unaccustomed noise; and even the smell of Gunpowder or Blucher, when passing on horseback, was sufficient to cause a mob to raise their heads inquiringly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LILIANFIELD—FETCHING A DOCTOR—A RAID OF THE MYALLS.

THE months flew round, shearing had come and gone, and things were beginning to assume a more homely appearance on "Lilianfield," as Stone had called his station in compliment to his wife's mother, whose Christian name was Lilian. John frequently rode over and spent a day or two with his friends, and Bessie was obliged to him for many little acts of courtesy and kindness which carried with them a tenfold value under the circumstances. He it was who took care that Lilianfield should never want milking-cows, which it probably would often have done but for him. This is saying a good deal; for it almost always happens that on sheep-stations milk is a rare article, time and expense forbidding the luxuries of the dairy. He it was who continued to send over a welcome change to the everlasting mutton, in the shape of choice pieces of beef whenever slaughtering day came round; and many other little attentions he was enabled to show his old friends, who became much attached to him, and reciprocated his kindness.

One piece of loving devotion, indeed, Stone never could forget, and Bessie ever after spoke of it with tears in her eyes. The wet weather was about commencing, and having a few idle days before him, John promised himself the pleasure of spending them at Lilianfield. As not unfrequently happened, they

were short of men there, and consequently everybody was unusually busy; and in addition to this, the man and woman in the kitchen (having for some unexplained reason taken offence) had left a few days before. This was the more distressing, for Bessie's confinement was shortly expected, and she and her husband depended much upon the assistance of the woman in question. Another female attendant had been sent for, but had not arrived, and Stone feared that she could not do so in time, for the creeks were swollen with the rains which had already fallen, and were at present impassable for all except daring swimmers.

It was dark when John rode up, for he had made a late start, and the rain fell heavily as he dismounted from his horse. The usually cheerful little place wore a garb of desolation. Bessie's bright cheerful face was not there with her gay welcome. He was soon informed of the cause by his distressed friend, who looked upon him as a Heaven-sent helper. Bessie had been suddenly taken ill, and there was no one to assist her but her half-distracted husband. It did not take John long to decide upon his course of action. About fifty miles away, near Byng's station, a little township had been formed. John was aware that a very skilful although dissipated surgeon had settled there, and he determined to go for him in spite of all obstacles. Hastily eating some food, he caught two of Stone's best horses, and soon he was on the banks of the river. It was moonlight, but through the cold dismal light John could discern the yellow turbid current foaming and churning its broad deep belt between him and the further shore, which he could but indistinctly make out. He never hesitated. Spurring his horse, he plunged in at a considerable distance higher up than the crossing. In a moment the cold water is up to his armpits, and his horses are snorting and puffing away, their heads only visible above the surface. It needs all his skill to keep them from mak-

ing down stream, and at the same time save himself from capsizing. His head becomes giddy as the flying water sweeps past him. Suddenly his horse strikes against a snag, and wildly rearing, falls backwards on the rider, who, in case of accidents, has been sitting with his feet out of the stirrup-irons. Under they go together; all is blackness and confusion; at last he rises to the surface, separated from his steed. Swush!—the current fiercely sweeps him along, and the horses follow him at a fearful pace. He is afraid of their disabling him with a stroke of their fore-feet, and turning, he splashes the water in their faces. This has the effect of frightening them a little; and as they pass him he succeeds in laying hold of the mane of one of them, and swimming alongside, with much exertion he at last gains the longed-for shore. The other animal (his saddle-horse) makes the bank some distance down. Everything is right, with the exception of one stirrup-leather which is missing, probably torn off by the river snags. He is wet, cold, and miserable, but he does not mind it. Fifty long miles, and three or four swollen creeks, smaller certainly, but not less disagreeable, lie between him and his destination; but he heeds not the distance or the danger, and soon he is cantering along the road, slipping and bogging at times, but pushing on with one object in his heart.

In spite of the rain, of swollen creeks and difficult travelling, John arrived at the township. As he expected, the doctor refused to come. John patiently sat a short time, drank some grog with him, listened to a yarn or two, and at last excited the maudlin admiration of the inebriated practitioner to such a degree, that his desire to return in John's company became as vehement as the other could have wished. Packing up the doctor's travelling medical-case, for he was too far gone to attend to it himself, and getting a fresh supply of grog for the road, John started. Once mounted, the doctor was in no humour for delay.

A fresh draught now and then from the bottle kept the steam up, and with the aid of fresh horses kindly lent by the officer in charge of a "native mounted police" station, recently erected near the road, they arrived by sundown at the river opposite Lilianfield. A couple of drays are camped near to the crossing, and quite a young lagoon of rain-water is lying in the hollows of each of the huge black tarpaulins which cover them. As they ride up, a savage-looking half-bred bulldog yelps hoarsely, and two or three men creep out from underneath the tarpaulin of the nearest dray, where they have been playing "Anty-up" (a favourite game with cards) for tobacco. John recognises a teamster who has been employed by himself.

"Good evening, Mick," he says; "how's the river?"

"Very high still," answers Mick, "but falling. It fell a good three feet since last night. You're not thinking of going across, are you?"

"Oh yes," returns John; "must cross."

"Then," says Mick, "you might let Mr Stone know that the woman he sent for, and her husband, are camped here with me. They're there," he added, nodding with his head in the direction of the other waggon.

"All right—but I'll be back again to-night;" and with that, John and the doctor moved on.

They crossed the river once more: the force of the current, though still strong, had abated greatly, and they arrived safely to John's relief. With the assistance of a station hand or two, and his friends at the bullock-waggons, the wise woman was ferried over the dangerous stream in a washing-tub, protesting all the time with much clamour that "she was a-going fur to be drownded; she know'd she was;" but the exhilarating effects of sundry long swigs at a square bottle of gin, and the force of her own compassionate though slightly rough nature, bore her triumphantly through in safety. The long ride had produced an unusual degree of sobriety in the doctor, and by

judicious management, he was kept in a proper state of temperance, until every danger had passed by, and Bessie was pronounced to be in a fair way to recovery.

As before said, John frequently rode over to Lilianfield during the wet weather; and with the intuitive quickness of her sex, Bessie guessed before long his love for some one; and he at last confided to her his secret, feeling much relieved in being able to talk about Ruth to one who could understand his feelings.

How different was the aspect of things this wet season compared with the last!

Stations were formed for nearly a hundred and fifty miles outside John's run, and he began to regard himself as quite an inside squatter. His neighbours greatly assisted him in keeping his cattle together, turning them back, and sending over notice whenever they were discovered making away; and, in like manner, he performed the same good office for them. Things soon began to wear quite a settled look.

He had also been most fortunate in his relations with the blacks. From the outset it had been his principle to leave them unmolested unless provoked to adopt severer measures; and he had been enabled as yet to keep them away without bloodshed. A more intimate acquaintance with the ways and customs of the whites had produced a certain amount of contempt for them among the Myalls; and here and there a murder of a white man or two in the district, or a wholesale spearing of cattle, announced that a war of aggression, and also of retaliation, had commenced. Indeed the behaviour of some of the whites was reprehensible in the highest degree; and a few of the more brutal spirits thought as little of "knocking over a nigger" at sight as they would have done of shooting a kangaroo.

This was, however, far from being a general feeling; and notwithstanding the charges brought against the pioneer squatters in the southern newspapers, by, for

the most part, ignorant and sentimental writers, those who were acquainted with them, and with the dangers and provocations of their daily lives, will admit that the greater number acted with temperate forbearance towards those tribes of aboriginals with whom they came in contact.

It was indeed both instructive and amusing to investigate the surroundings of some of those who espoused most loudly the cause of the "poor black." Some were comfortably settled southern squatters, whose fathers or predecessors had once been pioneers themselves, and who, in bequeathing to their followers the country they had wrested from the original inhabitants, had, along with it, transmitted to them a complicity and share in any injustice and guilt exercised in its acquisition. Others were blatant town politicians, anxious to develop the "resources of the country," who, by neglecting no opportunity of furthering immigration, discovering new gold-fields, and exploring fresh pastoral country, urged the energetic white men to seek their fortunes in places where they must of necessity come in contact with their black brethren, —a contact which history shows to have been ever attended with conflict.

A few were ministers of the Gospel, who, although shaking their heads in sorrowful disapproval of the manner in which the "poor blacks" were driven from their hunting-grounds in order to make room for the white man's sheep, never hesitated to acquire, if possible, on favourable terms, land thus appropriated,— or who were to be seen, armed with carbine or pistol, making their way from one little bush community to another, for the purpose of collecting money. The majority, however, were well-meaning men, but thoroughly ignorant of the state of matters, and of the real feelings and behaviour of most of those whose actions they condemned.

Things, as we have said, bore a cheerful and bright

aspect; and the rapidly increasing number of his young stock led our hero to look forward hopefully to the time when he might clear off the heavy debt which at present embarrassed him, and settle down into a breeder of pure stock, after the manner of his friend Fitzgerald. Stone had also done very well: his lambings had been good,—indeed they could hardly have been otherwise on the splendid country he owned; but the heavy expense of carriage, wages, &c., materially affected his profit. He felt that the roughness of the life was by no means suited to his young wife, and he made up his mind to sell Lilianfield on the first fair offer.

In pursuance of this scheme he had started on a trip down to the coast to meet a would-be purchaser, leaving Bessie with her infant at home. A married overseer, whose wife attended to the cooking, resided in a cottage close by, and Bessie's plucky heart would not permit her to detain her husband from his important business. The overseer was a good enough servant under the direction of his master, but foolhardy, and totally incapable of being intrusted with any charge by himself. Stone left with the intention of returning in about ten days, or twelve at the most.

Everything was safe; there seemed no possibility of anything going wrong at home; and if Bessie was in want of advice or help of any sort, she could send over for John.

So thinking, and hoping the result of his journey would render all fears unnecessary in future, Stone had started. John had been made aware of his friend's intended absence, and would have ridden over to see Bessie, but had been prevented owing to the sudden appearance of blacks on his run, who not only disturbed his cattle, but speared a number of them, and, among others, a valuable herd bull.

He had just returned from viewing the remains of the slain animals, and was sitting musing on the best

course to pursue, when Stone's blackboy, a little fellow about twelve years old, dashed up on a reeking horse.

"Missa Wess, black fellow kill 'em altogether. White fellow 'long o' Lillanfill!"

"What name?" (what do you say?) roared John, jumping up.

"Yohi," said the boy, still sitting on his horse, "altogether bong" (dead), "one fellow bail bong" (one not dead).

"Which one bail bong?" demanded John, in terror.

"Missis bail bong, ony cawbawn prighten" (Missis not dead, only dreadfully frightened).

"Blucher!" vociferated John at the top of his voice. (Gunpowder had been sent home to his tribe at his special request.)

Blucher appeared in a moment. He had grown to be a smart, active, intelligent lad, with his energies always strung to the utmost, as if waiting to dash forward and execute his master's orders as soon as communicated.

"Blucher," said John, "black fellow kill him white fellow."

Blucher's eyes glistened and started forward, the whites of them becoming ominously bloodshot.

"Which way?" he asked.

"Along o' Lilianfield. Get up the horses."

In a moment Bluey was mounted upon the other boy's horse; and soon gathering up the paddocked horses, he caught and saddled his own and his master's.

Arming himself with Snider and revolver, and providing his attendant with the same, John mounted, and with his two companions was soon galloping towards the scene of the disaster. As they proceeded, the usually smiling downs seemed to tell a tale of horror and bloodshed. Between the road and the blue mountain-ranges a huge bush-fire raged fiercely, the smuts from which, though many miles away,

floated down upon them as they tore along. The sky was lurid, and a dull roar struck their ears, intimating the extent and fury of the conflagration.

Blucher spurs alongside of his master, and points out that the road is covered with naked footprints. Presently they come across scattered mobs of sheep, apparently lost, and approach a sheep-station hut, to which the flock evidently belongs. John, still at a gallop, turns off the road to examine the hut, and Blucher draws his carbine, looking about him eagerly.

Yes; it is just as the blackboy expected. There lies one old shepherd on his face, across the threshold of the door, pierced by a couple of spears, and his head ghastly with tomahawk-wounds.

John does not feel at all surprised. Somehow it seems quite natural. He has no time to do anything at present, and is about riding away, when the little boy calls from the gateway of one of the yards—

"Here 'nother one white fellow."

Yes, so there is,—it is the mate of the first man. He lies doubled across a log, his head battered in in a most frightful manner, his old blue-serge shirt thick with gore, the jagged "nullah-nullah" which had been used in the atrocious deed broken on the ground near him.

"Come along!" shouts John, and once more he is hastening on towards Lilianfield.

As he dashes up to the door of the barred-up house, it opens, and Bessie rushes out dishevelled and pale, with her infant in her arms. She holds out her hand, but she cannot utter a word, and John has to lead her to a seat, where her feelings relieve themselves in a flood of tears. As soon as she could speak, she explained to John that soon after her husband left, the overseer had met some blacks on the run, and in opposition to the treatment adopted towards them by Stone, he had encouraged them about the head-station. For a few days they had behaved themselves with

propriety; but Bessie, fearful for the life of herself and child, had barricaded the house she resided in, and determined to await her husband's return. The overseer and his wife, on the contrary, saw no danger, and the woman could not be persuaded to sleep in the same house with Bessie. What occasioned the outbreak Bessie did not know, but a number of savages made a rush upon the unfortunate woman, killing her at once. They then tried to enter the house in which she herself dwelt, and were only deterred upon her firing two or three shots from her husband's revolver, which, urged by desperation, notwithstanding her total ignorance and dread of firearms, she succeeded in doing. The little blackboy had been away playing in the creek; and frightened by the wild shouts, which enabled him to guess what was being enacted, he lay hidden among the long-bladed grass tussocks until night, when, stealing out quietly, he made his way to the house, and finding his mistress alive, was directed by her to seek out John.

Bessie had seen nothing of the overseer, and feared that he had also paid for his foolhardiness with his life.

John soon made up his mind as to what had to be done. Writing a hasty note requesting the presence of the detachment urgently, he despatched the boy to the "officer in charge of the native mounted police barracks," near Byng's station, trusting that he might not be absent on patrol. Inditing another to the manager of an adjoining sheep-station, he put it into the hands of Blucher, instructing him to return with all haste.

He then set to work to dig a grave for the poor woman who had fallen a victim to the bloodthirsty aboriginals, with Bessie, whose nerves were dreadfully shaken, for a companion. So much occupied was he, that he did not hear her joyous exclamation of surprise as her husband galloped up furiously, and

springing off his horse, folded her to his heart; and his happiness was scarcely less than Bessie's when Stone stepped to the edge of the grave and called to him. Something had made Stone uneasy—what it was he could not say; but without waiting to finish his business he had hurried back, unable to rest until he had once more seen his wife and child. As he drew near his home his vague fears grew stronger, and the smoke-laden atmosphere seemed to fill him with a dread, to which the body of the overseer, lying a mutilated trunk on the road, gave only too fearful a reality.

All was well now, however, Bessie thought; and that evening, late, they had plenty of assistance in the shape of the Super of the run to which John had sent Blucher, who came over with three or four men.

Next morning early, Stone put Bessie in the buggy, and started over with her for the friendly manager's dwelling, where he had arranged she should remain for a week or two. John and the rest busied themselves in burying the overseer and the poor shepherds, and in collecting the sheep, which, fortunately, had remained in the vicinity of the yard. These they left in charge of three of the men, well armed, and then returned to Lilianfield head-station.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BLACK TROOPERS—PURSUIT AND ATTACK.

THEY had not been long back when two or three laden pack-horses passed the window, and, going to the door, they saw a body of ten native troopers drawn up in a line, and heard the command, "Dismount," from the officer in charge, who thereupon came up and shook hands with John and his friend, with whom he was a favourite. He was about twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age, by birth an Irishman, very gentlemanly in his manners, and of good family. Judicious and firm in the management of his command, he was one of the best officers in the service of Government, and his tact in managing his boys prevented desertions and kept them in a state of constant efficiency. He had been transferred to his present district from a barracks near a large gold-field, where a slight *hauteur* of manner had rendered him somewhat unpopular among the roughs, who believe in the glorious maxim of "Liberty, fraternity, and equality."

"Very glad to meet you, West, but sorry for the occasion. Nothing happened to Mrs Stone, I trust? I don't see her about."

"No, thank God!" said John; and he gave a short account of what had occurred.

"Ah! just so," returned the mounted trooper; one-half of the murders are occasioned by foolhardiness and an overweening trust in the generosity of the blacks. I'll just walk down and see the rations

served out, and return." So saying, he walked down to where his men had erected their tents.

Stone returned late in the evening; but as he felt the urgent need of looking after his other shepherds, and as their friend the superintendent could not longer spare the time from his own business, it was arranged that John alone should accompany the troopers in their pursuit. To tell the truth, John was not sorry for the opportunity thus afforded of striking wholesome terror into the tribe, which, notwithstanding his peaceful behaviour towards them, was beginning to cause him serious trouble and loss.

The troopers were, of course, delighted at the prospect of a collision with their countrymen, and an unusual degree of activity prevailed in the camp, —so much so, that next morning before sunrise, while Stone and his guest were getting through their hasty breakfast, the corporal of the troop made his appearance at the door, and stiffening himself into an erect military attitude, saluted gravely, reporting at the same time, "Every sing all righ, Mahmy."[1]

"Very good, Howard," returned his superior, whose name was Blake.

All were soon in readiness to start, and Blucher brought up his master's horse and his own, his eyes glistening with envy as he noted "the pomp and circumstance of glorious war" which attended the marshalling of his sable brethren.

The black troopers presented a very warlike and efficient front, as they stood up in line, each one by his horse's head, awaiting the order to mount.

The blue jackets, with their red collars and cuffs, became the dark complexions exceedingly well, and their wild faces were brought out into fierce relief by their curtained white cap-covers. White riding-trousers and serviceable leggings protected their ex-

[1] Mahmy or Mammie, the name given by black police to their officers.

tremities, and black leathern belts with large cartridge-pouches hung across their shoulders. Under each saddle lay a large blue military saddle-cloth bound with red. A change of clothing and a blanket, rolled in a strong piece of American duck, were strapped over the pommel of their saddles, and a Snider carbine hung on the right side.

Blake took his horse from the orderly who stood holding it, and walking forward a little, quietly gave the command—

"Prepare to mount—mount,"—motioning them at the same time in the direction in which they themselves knew they had to go.

After the first hundred yards the men broke the stiff cavalry order which they at first preserved, and rode at ease—two being, however, specially detailed to look after the pack-horses bearing the rations and spare ammunition, with the tents of the troop.

John and Blake brought up the rear at some distance.

The sub-inspector was a good-looking young man, with refined features and a dark complexion. A short moustache shaded the upper lip, and an occasional lisp gave a piquancy to his modulated voice, indicating a boyishness which its owner was far from possessing. He wore no uniform, with the exception of a white-covered forage-cap; but his horse was accoutred in a similar manner to that of his men, and in addition he wore a revolver in his belt. They made their way towards the sheep-station where the unfortunate shepherds had been killed—all the tracks having been ascertained to run in that direction. It soon turned out, from examination of circumstances, that the men were slaughtered merely because, in their retreat, the blacks had happened to drop across them.

Blake now halted his men, and ordered two to the front for the purpose of following up tracks, desiring the others to keep behind him and John with the

pack-horses. It would have been a work of some difficulty to trace the retreating mob from the hut, owing to the bush-fire which had swept over the country, but for the fact that the tracks of two or three who had lagged behind were discovered making over the burnt ground after their tribe.

The soft, powdered, black and grey *débris* of the long grass revealed the naked footprints distinctly; and steadily the advanced-guard followed them over the wide plain, and on to the banks of the river, where it issued from the hilly country, nearly fifteen miles above Lilianfield, and not very much farther from John's own run.

The tracks were two days old, and the boys pushed on rapidly but cautiously — eagerly listening to the slightest sound, and examining, with the most careful scrutiny, the leaves and twigs disturbed by the light-heeled Myalls in their retreat. Nothing escaped them; and whenever an important fact was discovered tending to throw light upon the particular tribe of blacks, or their numbers, or motives, the trooper who observed it would ride up and report the matter to his officer.

In about five miles farther they came upon a deserted camp. The numerous fires proved that it had been occupied by a large number of natives; and the bark gunyahs, and the heaps of ashes, denoted that they had resided in it for some time. Many trees were stripped of their bark in the neighbourhood, and beaten paths ran down to the water. Circular ovens, formed of large stones, for roasting meat, were in plenty; and here and there the presence of bullock-bones told John that his herd had supplied the camp with several good feeds. Smaller heaps of grey ashes, and heaps of mussel-shells surrounding the main hearth, pointed out where the warrior's wives and children had slept around him; and in the neighbourhood of each lay a big round stone or two, for the

purpose of pounding up the kernels of the nuts, whose husks lay in small piles about the camp. A few broken gourds, a broken spear or two, and a cracked *coolaman*,[1] were to be seen here and there; and small irregular pieces of the soft, thick bark of the ti-tree were scattered round the fires, on one or two of which a brand still smouldered.

The detachment halted and camped for the night about a mile farther on. There was a certain amount of romance about the pursuit of the savages, which awoke a sentiment of pleasure in John's nature; and the feeling of being the hunter was much more agreeable than that of being the hunted one—a position which, in connection with this very tribe, he had experienced several times.

The night was bright and clear, and the moon was at the full. The fire-lights falling upon the stacked carbines and military accoutrements, formed a fitting background for the circle of wild-eyed and fiercely whiskered and moustached troopers, and gave a picturesqueness to the camp. Blucher sat in the centre, an entranced listener to endless stories, the drift of which John could guess from the oft-repeated sounds of "Poo'oh, poo'oh," — as the narrator imitated the firing of carbines, amid roars of laughter from the rest. John shared Blake's tent; — their conversation was prolonged until near midnight, and on going outside before preparing for sleep, they were astonished to find that a total eclipse of the moon had taken place. The boys were all asleep, but were soon awakened by the orderly who answered Blake's summons. They stared at the moon in wonder, and discussed matters in awe-struck whispers.

"Ask them," said Blake, "what has occasioned this darkness."

The man left, and after some time returned, saying the rest were unanimous that the "devil-devil"

[1] Native vessel for fetching water.

had caused it, in order the more easily to catch 'possums.

"No doubt," returned Blake; and soon John and he were fast asleep.

Next morning all hands were in their saddles by sunrise, and the pursuit was recommenced. The travelling was in some places very difficult, it being necessary to cross the river frequently, owing to the tortuous nature of its course; and the fording of the stream was made very dangerous by the large rocks and slippery boulders which lay in its bed, causing the horses to stumble or their shod hoofs to slide. The numerous tracks in the river-sand plainly showed that the main body of the retreating natives had followed the water-course; and the peculiar smell from the small fresh-burnt patches of river-grass here and there, told that they could not be very far away. Camps of small parties, all making after the main mob, were frequently found; and the heaps of mussel-shells, fish-bones, and remains of fresh-water turtle about them, proved that it did not take them long to provide a liberal supply of food for a mid-day meal. That they were in dread of being chased was evident by the long stages between their principal resting-places. The troopers' excitement now gave them much the air of kangaroo-hounds looking about for their game; and one of them, after staring fixedly ahead of him for some time, rode up and reported that he saw a camp-smoke in the distance. Blake now called a halt, and took the opinion of the troop. They were all keen bushmen, and acquainted with every artifice of bush warfare.

"Do you all see the smoke, boys?" inquired Blake.

"Yes, sir; good way ovah dere," answered the corporal, Howard, a large-bodied, active, bloodthirsty-looking man, with a long drooping moustache. John followed Blake's gaze, and shaking his head slowly from side to side, in imitation of the troopers, was

thereby enabled clearly to discover a faint column of smoke rising afar off. They now proceeded more cautiously, passing as they did some places where, from the fresh wood-shavings from newly-made nullah-nullahs, and recently-cut holes in trees covered with 'possum-hair or owls' feathers, they felt assured the tribe had passed that morning early. Numbers of crows also indicated that the offenders were not far ahead, these birds always following in the wake of a native camp.

Blake once more commanded a halt, and ordering two of his most intelligent boys to strip naked, he sent them ahead to scout, their uncovered forage-caps, however, being carried in their belts, to serve if necessary as distinction between them and the Myalls.

Pushing rapidly onwards, the spies disappeared in the forest, and the troop moved slowly after them. In about an hour's time they were met returning, and in excited whispers reported that they had come in sight of the wild men's camp. They further stated that their presence had been observed by the watchful eyes of one of the natives, who, however, mistook them in the distance for two of his own companions, signalling to them with his hand to join him, which they, however, managed to avoid; and under the pretence of looking for *chewgah-bag*, they made their way into the river-bed, and thence back to the troop.

A rapid description of the situation of the camp enabled Blake to make a proper disposition of his men in attacking it. The Myalls were, it appeared, settled for the night in the sandy bed of the river, which there flowed between the rocky eminences, densely clothed with scrub.

First of all dismounting and turning out the horses, the troopers stripped themselves of everything but their shirts, caps, and cartridge-belts.

Then addressing them shortly, Blake rehearsed his plan of attack. Four boys were to advance stealthily on each side through the scrub and occupy the rocky

heights. One of the four on each side was then t make his way to the river-banks, taking the camp i rear. As soon as these had effected a junction the were to advance, driving, if possible, the unsuspectin savages down the river into the teeth of Blake and John who, with the two other troopers, were to bear the brunt of the shock.

This arrangement being thoroughly understood, the party started on foot, and shortly afterwards the faint cooeys and shouts told them that the cruel murderers were all gathered together and resting after the toils of the chase, which, notwithstanding the rapidity of the retreat, they had not neglected. The thick bushes and shrubs growing in the river afforded a shelter to the small party who there awaited the signal which was to tell them that the camp was surrounded and the hour of retribution arrived.

At last it came. Boom—boom, broke upon the still evening air, and in a moment the river-gorge resounded with the wild war-cries of the men and the terrified clamour of the women and children.

"Look out, West! here they come," shouts Blake, as a dozen black figures, with hideous features under their streaming locks, burst upon them, armed with spears and nullah-nullahs.

Bang—bang, go a couple of carbines, and two of them drop on their tracks.

"Hu—hu—hu—hu—prrrrrrr!—hah—hu—hu—hio —prrrrrrr!" yell the Myalls, sending two or three volleys of spears and boomerangs at their unexpected assailants.

They have as yet had no experience of the superiority of the white man's weapons, and make a stand for a little, but they soon perceive that it is futile. Here and there the carbines crack among the rocks and bushes, and at last cease. The black fellows have succeeded in getting away or in hiding themselves in the crevices of the rocks. Blake and his party advance to examine

the camp. As they go along, Howard, the corporal, who has distinguished himself particularly, almost stumbles over a little, fat, round pickaninny (child) rolled up in a bundle of bark; and picking it up hastily, he carries it along with him. Here are a group of ugly old black hags on the ground, clamorously yelling, and gashing their heads with sharp stones. "It is a pity," says Blake pointing to them, "that their sex prevents their punishment; they are always the instigators of any outrage committed by the men." Howard deposits the infant in the lap of one of them, admonishing her to look after it and cease her roaring, and makes off to join his fellows in pursuit of other male blacks. Everywhere are children and gins sitting among the bushes, or endeavouring to steal away with all they can muster together. Ordering a trooper to collect them and stand sentry, Blake directs John's attention to a couple of buckets and some tin billies, besides axes and tomahawks, which have been carried away from Lilianfield. One demon-like old woman wears a small shawl tied round her loins, which John recognises as having belonged to the overseer's wife. Their own dilly-bags have nothing of value or interest in them. Some locks of hair rolled up in thin slips of bark, probably belonging to a deceased friend; a piece or two of crystal for magic purposes; two or three bones and some fat, which the troopers, who, from their own upbringing, are authorities on such things, pronounce human; a primitive-looking bone fish-hook or two, and some string, made of opossums' hair,—that is all.

Shouts of laughter are now heard from the rocks on the opposite side of the river, and John and Blake make their way over to discover the cause. Now and then there is an interval of silence, which is immediately followed by an uncontrollable scream of hearty laughter from several voices.

Just before John and his friend reach the spot, two

shots are fired in rapid succession, and on joining the police they find them standing round the body of a native.

"What are you laughing at, Howard?" demands his officer.

"Oh, Mahmy! we find this one wild fellow lyin' down gammonin' dead. I know that one not dead. I no see hole belongin' to bullet; and Jack and Turkey here" (pointing to two other troopers), "been take a long piece grass, and tickle that one along a inside noss, and then dead black fellow been 'tsee, tsee'" (imitating sneezing), "and me an' altogether cawbawn laff. By-and-by that fellow get up an' want to run away, an' me been chewt him."

Blake turned away, muttering, "It's no use saying anything to them, they wouldn't understand it." A search resulted in the discovery of eight dead bodies. Some more had probably been wounded, and had escaped.

The slain aboriginals lay in various attitudes. Here was one stretched on his back, his spears in one hand, and his stone tomahawk in the other, the small pupil yet gleaming from amid the yellow whiteness of the half-closed glassy eye—the little hole in his dusky bosom indicating the road which his wild spirit had taken on leaving its earthly habitation. There another on his face, hands and legs spread out; a third had rolled to the bottom of a ravine, where, still clutching his tomahawk, he retained a diabolically hideous and truculent expression of countenance.

All articles of any value were by Blake's orders collected.

A large fire having been lighted, the spoils of the camp were by its means destroyed: spears were broken, and stone tomahawks gathered and carried away, to be thrown into the deepest pool of the river. These arrangements having been carried out, the party re-

turned to where their horses had been turned out, and camped for the night.

With dawn, all hands were once more astir, and again the inexorable sub-inspector continued his chase, and by dint of persevering tracking, and much climbing, he succeeded in discovering and again surprising the encampment, which had been shifted much farther back, in a wild and almost inaccessible part of the mountain-range,—explaining to John the great necessity there was for convincing the natives that it was possible to follow and harass them in their most formidable strongholds.

In rushing this camp one of the boys was wounded by a spear, which, penetrating the thick part of the leg, nearly cut the main artery; another received a large gash on the thigh from a boomerang; and John himself narrowly escaped death at the hands of a big black fellow, who was shot by Blake. Blucher behaved with much pluck, and earned great praise for coolness from his companions. Once more the camp was sacked, and the spoil destroyed; and mounting their horses, the avenging band began their homeward march, and next evening, about sundown, came in sight of Lilianfield. As soon as the buildings were observed, the corporal rode up to Blake, saying, "Please, sir, boy want to sing out."

"Very well, Howard, they may do so," answered the former.

Presently arose in concert a tremulous cry, gradually increasing in intensity, and winding up with fierce whoops. It had a horrible blood-curdling effect, and the black horsemen kept it up until their arrival—such being the customary anouncement made by them and their fellows of having returned covered with the blood of the slain.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DEPARTURE OF THE STONES—STRUGGLES—LOVE IN THE BUSH.

In a short time things resumed their wonted appearance, and the excitement consequent on the attack by the aboriginals had passed away. John felt himself quite happy in his new home, and looked forward with certainty to making a competence. The only thing which troubled him was, that he had never received an answer to his last letter from Ruth. He seemed fated to be kept in a state of uneasiness about her, and although he made strenuous exertions through Fitzgerald, he could not even discover her whereabouts. Stone had never ceased to keep his station in the market, and at last his perseverance had procured for him a purchaser. The new owner of Lilianfield came from Riverina in New South Wales, and his eye was at once taken with the glorious extent of downs and plains, country the value of which he knew by experience, and he cheerfully paid the somewhat long price demanded by Stone. The latter made his way down to Betyammo, where, leaving Bessie and her infant, he set out to look about him for a new investment.

John felt their departure to be a severe blow, their kindness had endeared them to him, and indeed had they been of his own blood he could not have loved them better. His attention, however, was much taken up with his own affairs, for about this time old Mr Fitzgerald, who was chief owner, formed the idea of transforming the run into a sheep-station. In vain

he wrote to dissuade the old gentleman, in vain he begged his friend to exert his influence with his father. The old squatter, never very easy to persuade at any time, remained inflexible; and even young Fitzgerald answered, that although he himself preferred cattle, he thought that more money could be made of sheep, and strongly advised John to follow the advice of his father, whose great experience had ever shown him the safest and shortest road to success.

For some time our hero hesitated as to his course of action, but at last, partly out of deference to his partners' opinions, and partly from a desire to remain connected with them, he reluctantly consented to the change. Nothing could have been more distasteful to himself personally, for cattle were his hobby, and he would willingly have been contented with a very much less profit than his friends looked forward to, in order to have retained them.

The weary day came at last. John had had yards built, and huts erected in carefully selected positions on the run, and soon the baaing clamour arose amid clouds of dust, as the overlanders arrived with their fleecy charge. Good-bye now to the shady cattle-camps, and the quick thunder of the hoofs on the short greensward, as the eager stock-horse rounded-up the panting mob. The cattle were mustered and sold, and John viewed their departure with a full heart.

Once more came days of lost sheep, of anxious care, and uncertainty. Once more came long midnight rides and thunderstorms, the carrying out of rations, bad lambings, and harassing shearings. Once more he was dependent upon the supply of labour, and he had to fly about humouring the discontented, praising the lukewarm, arguing with some, and taking the law into his own hands with others, the recipient of all complaints, and the bearer of every one's burden.

If success had depended solely upon his own individual exertions or knowledge, he would not have been

without his share of it; but alas! such was not the case. The fact was, as he himself suspected, the country upon which the hardy-natured cattle throve, was not suited to the delicate merino, and consequently his was a constant strife against nature. On the other hand, it was most trying to remark how the flocks increased and fattened on the luxuriant pasturages of Lilianfield, which station was under the management of an inexperienced youth, a relation of its owner. It was aggravating in the extreme to have on occasions to listen to the self-adulatory remarks of this conceited youngster (in point of management or knowledge little better than a cipher), who took to himself the credit due to the rich grasses of the station, which, with all his folly and ignorance, he could not ruin.

For the first year things went pretty well considering: although but few lambs were weaned, yet John hoped to be able, before another year passed by, to induce his partners either to sell the run or the sheep, and return to his favourite pursuit of cattle-breeding. This hope might also have been realised had colonial matters continued in their former state; for a visit paid to the new station by the younger Fitzgerald, had brought him entirely round to John's way of thinking, and on leaving, he promised to urge his father to carry out John's wishes.

Sheep-farming, however, had a dark time ahead of it. For some time past wool-growers had been made uneasy by the constantly falling prices of the English and foreign wool markets, and truly did the lowering pulse indicate the sickness and depression gradually stealing over the whole country. Lower and yet lower sank the quotations, until nearly all sheep-owners were reduced to the very verge of despair. Three parts of the squatters were men who had been encouraged by the former high value of wool, and the apparently steady demand which existed for it, to hazard their all in acquiring sheep and country.

Scarcely had a station been discovered and stocked, when the unlooked-for heavy expenses connected with it, compelled its unhappy owner to seek aid from the hands of the Sydney bankers and commission agents. A mortgage on the run immediately followed, and interest at ten per cent was soon brought up—by commission upon goods supplied, wool-brokerage, compound interest, and the hundred other charges and devices so well understood by the human ghouls who fatten upon the decay of their fellow-creatures—to seventeen per cent, or in some cases considerably more.

The sheep had been bought at high figures, the fall in wool had of course reduced their price, in many cases to one-sixth of their original value, and in others even more. Wages were also high in the outlying districts settled by the pioneers, who, for many reasons, were the heaviest sufferers by the crisis.

John West suffered with the rest. The younger Fitzgerald had indeed succeeded in gaining his father over to the views held by himself and John, but it was then too late to sell, except at such a sacrifice as even all were unwilling to make, and John consented to hold on if possible, and await better times.

His future seemed at this period one of peculiar darkness, but he struggled along, urged by the desperate hope which enables some men to cling tenaciously to the faintest chance of recovery. But his case was even worse than those of many around him. His sheep did not thrive, things were daily growing worse and worse, and sheep were a drug in the market.

He struggled on bravely. What a life it was! After the wet season the long grass sprang up, and quickly seeding, caused his sheep to resemble pincushions. It was impossible to grasp a handful of the wool owing to the millions of tiny needle-like seeds with which it abounded. Nay, the very mutton itself was full of them, and it ever remained a mystery to West how

sheep could exist in the misery which they must have suffered. The inside of every sheepskin appeared black with the sharp needles which had penetrated it. In every portion of the animal's body they were to be found, those penetrating to the heart, of course, occasioning death. The swampy pastures also introduced foot-rot among the flocks, and his spare time was always occupied in cutting and dressing hoofs, the very smell of which made him ill. Other diseases also were not wanting, and his sheep decreased in numbers rapidly. The lambing seemed to be a farce, which custom alone rendered it necessary to undertake. The bleating of a lamb jarred painfully on his ears, its plaintive cry too surely foreboding the end awaiting it.

He had parted with the cattle about two years, and was in the middle of his sheep struggles, when the mailman one day rode up, bringing him a letter from the younger Fitzgerald. Expecting to find it as usual relating to station affairs, he threw it aside to peruse at leisure, and continued the work he had in hand. That evening, drawing his correspondence towards him with a sigh, he tore open his friend's letter first, and commenced to master its details, much after the fashion of a boy learning his lesson. But his stolidity passed away; he gradually became excited; and eventually, passion overcoming his accustomed composed and self-reliant manner, he started up, dashed the letter to the ground, and stamping on it furiously, he stormed up and down the room, raving out incoherent threats and wild upbraidings.

What was the cause of his emotion? Simply this: The letter from his friend contained the announcement that Mr Cosgrove had returned to Cambaranga, and that, in the person of his step-daughter, Fitzgerald had discovered Miss Bouverie, the lady to whom he had lost his heart in Sydney, and whom he was now determined, if possible, to make his wife.

To account for John West's surprise, we must now give a brief summary of events at Cambaranga and Betyammo during the years that he had been struggling in the new country.

The old house was again occupied, and had assumed a look of cheerfulness which it had not worn for many a day. Cosgrove himself took little interest in anything. He had changed greatly within the last two years. His figure had lost its elasticity, and his voice was no longer cheery and loud; while his hair had grown grey—almost white. His son's frightful crime had, with the discovery of his other misdemeanours, given him a shock from which he never recovered. Soon after Ralf's flight he had left Cambaranga for Melbourne, where he was joined by Ruth. She had been staying during his visit to Cambaranga with Mr and Mrs Berkeley, relatives of her mother and her own, who gladly would have kept her altogether, for they were childless, and both were proud of their young kinswoman's beauty and accomplishments.

When the details of the murder first became known, Mr Berkeley instantly made preparations for leaving Sydney for some time, to escape the disagreeable scandal to which his relationship with the reputed sister of the murderer might give birth.

Ruth was happy with her friends, and grew to love them much; but when she saw Cosgrove haggard and miserable, cursing the fate which had left him a childless man, she could not bear to desert him,—he had always been good to her,—and she determined (to her friends' great indignation) to make her home with her step-father. He now began to value her companionship. He did not talk to her much, but he took pleasure in being near her, and would remain for hours wrapped in thought while she sat at her work or her studies.

Cambaranga was being managed by a superintendent, and Cosgrove and his daughter were conse-

quently free to roam where they liked. Part of their time was spent in Tasmania and part in New Zealand, for Mr Cosgrove had given up all intentions, if he ever had any, of returning to England; and although he never spoke on the subject to Ruth, it seemed to her as if he wanted to be near his son, should his aid ever be required. The fall in wool had compelled him, with many others, to return and look after his business himself, and he found that owing to the incompetence of his manager he had suffered severely in his means.

In fact, it was a toss-up whether or not he could weather through the storm. His mind, formerly so clear, had become clouded and hazy, and the difficulties out of which at one time he would have threaded his way with ease, threatened to overwhelm him.

Ruth had not been long at Cambaranga when Phœbe Gray, who felt much for the lonely girl, rode over to make a call, and conceived a strong liking for her. She contrived to excite an equal amount of enthusiasm in the breasts of her father and mother; and notwithstanding the dislike of the former for Mr Cosgrove, she induced him to drive over with her to Cambaranga in order to bring Ruth back on a visit. Her step-father, although demurring at first, yielded eventually to Mr Gray's representations, that so continual a life of solitude would prove injurious to her health; and she returned with them to Betyammo, where her unaffected gentle ways and ladylike manners speedily made her the favourite of all.

Willy Fitzgerald had, since his friend's departure, thought much on what he had said in reference to Phœbe Gray, and during the many opportunities which he had of watching her, he was forced to admit that she was all John had described her to be; but he could not forget the face or conversation of his

unknown love, and were it not for his eminently practical nature, he might have been tempted to start on an expedition in search of her. Time, however, had begun to weaken the impression, and of late he had been a more frequent visitor at Betyammo, and had taken much pleasure in the time spent there. His visits to all were most acceptable, and to none more so than to demure little Phœbe, whose fluttering heart told her the reason why, whenever she heard his manly voice exchanging greetings with her father, or his firm quick step on the verandah. Her fancy for Ruth amused him much, and he was accustomed to tease her about the enthusiasm with which she spoke of her new friend. He himself had not as yet ridden over to Cambaranga, partly from his old detestation of its owner, and partly from a delicacy connected with the dreadful career of his son. He had consequently had no opportunity of seeing Ruth.

It happened one evening that Ruth, who was staying for a few days with her new friends at Betyammo, was standing in the doorway at the back of the picturesque old cottage. She leant slightly against the sidepost of the door, and mused quietly with bent head, as she traced lines on the sandy floor with her little foot. The setting sun was bathing everything in a sea of golden mellow light, and the heavy bunches of grapes glowed under their leafy shade. The calm stillness of evening was unbroken, save for the murmured cooing notes of the squatter pigeons, as they followed each other down to their favourite water, and the happy utterances of the bright-winged little parrots, half-a-dozen of which had nests far down in the hollow trunk of the gnarled old monarch of the forest, from whose branches the gigantic convolvulus hung in richer and more graceful festoons than ever. Occasionally the lowing of cattle fell faintly upon the ear, and the smell of wild-flowers became per-

ceptible. Ruth was suddenly awakened from her reverie by hearing the peculiar warning cry of Bessie's old pet, the Native Companion, who came dancing along with outspread wings, uttering a startled coo'-oorrrrrooor, coo'oorrrrrooor. On looking up hastily she became aware of the presence of a gentleman who had dismounted from his horse, and who was gazing eagerly upon her with an earnest wondering expression.

"Good God, Miss Bouverie!" he said, "when did you come here?"

For a moment she started. She remembered having seen a face somewhere like the one now before her, but she could not recall where. It was a pleasant but a faint memory, yet she failed to recollect the circumstances. "I came here to-day from Cambaranga," she replied; "but who are you?"

"From Cambaranga!" uttered Fitzgerald — for it was he—still more perplexed, and somewhat piqued at not being recognised. "Is it possible, Miss Bouverie, that you do not remember me at Mrs Berkeley's in Sydney?"

She smiled; she knew him now,—his voice had been recalling him. It was her turn now to be surprised and glad, for she had liked the young man, whose visit had been driven out of her memory by subsequent painful events. One other explanation, which Fitzgerald scarcely needed, unravelled the whole story. Ruth's father's name was Bouverie, and in consequence, the misapprehension had arisen which had mystified him.

The sun of nature was sinking to rest amid its opal and golden glories; but Fitzgerald's sun had appeared, and blazed with a splendour and brilliancy only the more intense for the long night of darkness which had preceded it. While he gazed on Ruth's beautiful animated features as she spoke of her childhood's days, Willy Fitzgerald felt intoxicated with

love. The dark shaded eyes glistened with a moisture which deepened their soft earnestness, and the innocent childlike lips trembled as they returned the thanks of the maiden for service rendered to the child.

Phœbe coming out of the house at this moment, curious to know what could have loosened the strings of Ruth's quiet tongue, took in the situation at a glance, and a bitter pang filled her straightforward honest heart. She little guessed how deeply Ruth's memory had been graven on Fitzgerald's heart; but she had heard John West, a day or two before his departure, make a laughing allusion to some Sydney lady, whose beauty had exercised a magic influence over him, and she had ever since cherished a secret desire to know more of her. She knew now. Unconsciously she began to hate her friend. A tearing, burning, horrible feeling took possession of her breast, which was not lessened when the squatter, after greeting her kindly, turned once more to Ruth with an evident admiration which betrayed too truly how he hung upon every word her lips uttered. Poor Phœbe struggled hard to suppress the anger which had taken possession of her.

During the evening meal, instances of blind adoration were multiplied before Phœbe's understanding eyes, and what appeared to her father and mother as only natural interest in a pretty girl, bore a very different significance to her. She passed a miserable evening, and when she retired to her room she struggled for hours in prayer against the horrible feelings which she was amazed to find deep-rooted in her breast. She slept but little that night, and awoke next morning to endure a fresh series of mortifications and unintentional slights, which lacerated her wounded spirit. And yet in honesty she could not charge Ruth with behaviour unbecoming her self-respect. She made no advances

unworthy of maidenly modesty, and adopted non of the little artifices or tactics calculated to excit a lover's admiration. Her manner, after the firs moments of surprise had passed away, returned t its accustomed quiet and repose. Unconscious of th admiration she excited she could not have been; bu whether it was that she was accustomed to the effect of her own beauty, or that she valued not the con quest she had made, Ruth sought not to improv her triumph. Phœbe observed all this, and stil found it a hard matter not to detest one whose ver indifference was prized by the man she herself bes loved in the world.

Phœbe herself seemed to have faded out of Fitz gerald's memory, for during the two days that h spent at Betyammo he was seldom absent from Ruth' side. Inspired by her presence, he became brilliant sometimes even witty; his bearing grew more erec and his gallantry more marked. It was with diffi culty that Phœbe restrained herself from allowing th state of her soul to become apparent. These wer hours of the acutest agony; but after much fierc wrestling with herself, she subdued the wild torment and schooled herself to bear her lot in silence at least It was, however, unavailing. Ruth soon discovered a difference in her, and for some little time was a a loss to guess its cause. Phœbe's eyes occasionally bore traces of weeping, and the calm, well-regulated mind betrayed signs of an unaccustomed agitation.

A few evenings after the owner of Ungahrun left Betyammo, the Gray family had separated to retire for the night, and Ruth, who had sought her own room, felt impelled to seek out Phœbe, and if possible discover the cause of her unhappiness. Entering the little bright chamber, so neat and trim, and suggestive of maidenly purity, she saw Phœbe kneeling by the side of the white-curtained bed, her head buried in her hands. Her knock had not been heard, and

she could plainly distinguish the sobs of the kneeling girl, as she poured out supplications for aid and guidance.

Ruth's first impulse was to return as quickly as she had advanced; but yielding to second thoughts, she moved forward, and, sinking beside her friend, she stole her arm around her waist silently, offering up her own requests for the direction and assistance of the suppliant. Together they knelt for some time in silence; then rising, Ruth led the agitated girl to a seat, and sitting down beside her, commenced, without exactly knowing why, to tell the story of her own griefs and sorrows. She became aware, as the history advanced, of an increased interest on the part of Phœbe when she spoke of John's kindness and the affection she had entertained for him, and intuitively she began to suspect the origin of her friend's distress. Delicately she enlarged upon her own feelings, and gave utterance to hopes and thoughts which till then had never shaped themselves in words; and she felt, as Phœbe drew closer to her, and laid her sobbing head trustfully upon her shoulder, that she had been enabled to administer a degree of consolation which acted in some measure as a healing balm to the stricken girl.

After this evening they became firmer friends than ever, but a tacit understanding forbore further approach to the delicate topic. Fitzgerald was a constant visitor, but his devotion awakened no response in Ruth's breast. She endeavoured to time her visits to Betyammo when business was most likely to keep her adorer at home; so that, if possible, Phœbe should be spared the sight of what could not be otherwise than painful to her.

Fitzgerald himself was at a loss to account for Ruth's behaviour. He knew that she was intelligent, and gifted beyond the average, but her brightest moods were reserved for others; and exert himself to please her as he might, he was unable to obtain the smallest

encouragement. Indeed he could not help suspecti sometimes a desire on her part to avoid his notic but he had been so general a favourite, and so mu sought after, that he never for a moment conte plated rejection.

Stone's search for a home had terminated in t purchase of a very fine freehold property of ov seven thousand acres in extent, about one hundr miles distant from Brisbane, and contiguous to growing country town. He and Bessie establish themselves here, surrounded by pleasant neighbour and the ex-pioneer devoted his time to the fattenir of store cattle purchased from stations at some di tance up-country, combined with the formation of pure-bred herd of shorthorn cattle,—in which pu suit he took much interest, and which promised hi a most profitable return on the money invested in it.

A visit from Bessie assisted greatly in keepin matters straight, and a few whispered words of e couragement in Ruth's ear were a sufficient rewar for her self-control. The latter had feared lest th stigma attached to the crime committed by her ste father's son might have included her within its wit ering shade, and she felt that, without further evi enough had befallen John through his connectio with Mr Cosgrove. On this account she had re frained from answering his last letter, which, no withstanding, she prized as one of her greatest trea sures; and it pained her to think that he migh ascribe to disinclination and ingratitude a reticenc which resulted from a desire for his welfare. But Joh West had no such ideas; and at the moment whe Fitzgerald's letter had roused all the latent passio within him, he loved her with an intensity whic surprised himself. It was a strange, faithful love— imaginative indeed, but not the less pure and sin cere. Seeing few of the opposite sex, his mind eve reverted to the one bright type of it which had cap

tivated his boyish fancy. The realising of his dreams one day was his greatest incentive to struggle through his hard life. Lying down or rising up, his most secret and cherished thoughts were of Ruth. It was therefore he rejoiced in his early successes; they brought him nearer to her: on her account he fretted over his disasters; they removed from him his hope.

Days elapsed after the receipt of the news which had affected his peace of mind so violently, before he recovered any degree of serenity. In vain he argued with himself; in vain he compared his prospects with those of his more fortunate friend. The latter was everything she could desire. What had he himself to offer? Even supposing that her love still remained his—and he laughed bitterly as the thought struck him—what would he do with her? He had no home to offer; and were he indeed to obtain a situation as manager of a station (a very remote contingency at this time, when the ruin of hundreds filled each journal with advertisements from well-known and capable men, clamorous for employment), what kind of home would it be to her, brought up in luxury and accustomed to refinement? How could she, tender and inexperienced, encounter the coarse everyday realities of hard practical life, which were the portion of an underpaid and overworked superintendent's wife? He might at any moment be thrown out of his situation at the caprice of some arrogant, self-made, vulgar rich man; and Ruth's delicate susceptibilities might be shocked at having perforce to mingle with coarser and baser natures. No; it was all a folly. He was mad to think of her at all. He was worse than mad to feel as he did towards the friend who had shown him kindness of the most disinterested kind. What a dog in the manger would he be to stand between her and that comfort which goes so great a way in promoting the happiness of married life!

With these feelings he turned once more desper-

ately to work, and strove, by the violence of his exertions, to blunt the sharpness of his reflections; but little satisfaction could be derived from the contest in which he was engaged. It seemed as if the very forces of nature were arrayed against him; for the season proved one of the driest which it had been his fate to witness. A scorching heat withered up all green-feed, bringing numberless miseries in its train. The wretched condition of the sheep betrayed their unhappy state, and their fast-decreasing numbers were only too sure an index of the utter unfitness of the country on which they depastured. Scarcely three-fourths remained of the original number which had been delivered to John. Vast bush-fires sprang up in all directions, devouring the dry tinder-like grass, and filling the air with a smoky haze. The water-holes dried one by one. In some there remained a small quantity of thick, green, watery slime, encircled by tenacious fathomless mud, out of which the weakened limbs of the animals, who were attracted by the smell of the precious liquid, failed to draw their water-swollen bodies; and around most of these water-traps (for they were nothing else) lay embedded helplessly a ring of slowly perishing, despairing-eyed creatures, famishing with hunger and dying with thirst under a blazing sun.

Sheep were lost daily, and wandered about at their will, all the efforts of the worn-out shepherds failing to keep them together; and indeed, in most instances, it was as a great personal favour to John himself that the men remained with him during the fearful drought. Lean, disease-stricken native dogs dragged their mangy bodies along beside gaunt tottering kangaroos, without strength or courage to assail them; and dead wallabies and other animals lay about everywhere.

What misery it was! Exertions were fruitless to alleviate suffering or prevent loss, and John felt his

heart hardening; his soul began to rebel, and bitterness to flow from that inward fount from which had welled a spring of love to all.

He had returned to his hut after an unusually fatiguing day of useless labour. He ate his lonely meal of salt junk and damper, and lighting his pipe, he paced up and down in front of his solitary abode. It was one of those beautiful moonlit nights, which were without beauty to the owners of the parched, waterless pieces of territory, on which they could behold their stocks dying without being able to assist them in the slightest. The heaven was without a single cloud. The sweet influences of Pleiades had no power to modify the sufferings on earth, and the red Aldebaran looked pitilessly with an eye of fire upon a fiery world. All around, the horizon glared with the reflected glow of huge conflagrations. As he strode up and down in his bitterness of soul, he realised more acutely the great weight of the burden which bowed him down. Descending from the branches of an iron-bark tree beside him, a beautiful little mangaroo [1] floated downwards on outstretched wings to the foot of a tall sapling at a little distance away, and nimbly ascending it, was followed by his mate, who, quickly imitating the example set her, perched herself on a branch adjoining. There they chattered and played, frolicking among the branches, through which the white moon shone with cold hard loveliness. As John watched their merry gambols, some sympathetic chord of his nature was touched. How gladsome and joyous they looked! They were content with their humble lot. Some degree of their happiness radiated into his own heart, and he "blessed them unawares." A feeling of hope sprang up in his soul, and his fast-waning faith and trust in the good prov-

[1] A description of the small flying squirrel, with exquisitely fine fur.

idence of God struck a deeper root and found a richer soil. He went about his cheerless work with a renewed strength; and shortly afterwards, to his great joy, a change in the weather brought with it a cessation from his hardest toil.

Not very long after the drought had passed away, John received a letter from young Fitzgerald, enclosing one from his father, which intimated that arrangements had been made for selling the run for what it would bring by auction. The letter went on to state that, as the speculation had proved disastrous to all concerned, and as John had lost the capital which he had invested in it, he was authorised to draw the sum of £300 as some compensation for the exertions he had made when in charge.

The younger Fitzgerald's letter merely congratulated his friend on having ended his slavery, and, apparently taking it for granted that he would make his way straight to Ungahrun, concluded by saying that they would there talk over his future plans. These Fitzgerald had already arranged in his own mind. John was to manage Ungahrun at a liberal salary, which would be some indemnification for what he had already gone through; while he himself would marry Ruth, and with her visit the much-talked-of Europe.

The sale was concluded; John had given delivery; and he and his faithful Blucher, now almost out of his senses with joy at the thought of returning to his tribe, were on their way down to Ungahrun. The undertaking of the journey had been a subject of much inward conflict with John. He told himself how much better it would be to keep away, and never look upon Ruth again; but with curious inconsistency he brought forward stronger arguments, which proved how ungrateful he would appear to his other friends should he not return amongst them, if only for a short visit; and at last he started with an uneasy conscience.

Many a well-known spot he remembered as he travelled along. Here he had camped with his cattle during the rain. Into these lagoons they rushed when parched with thirst. This is the identical gully into which he and his horse fell headlong during the stampede of his cattle. Now he is on the Cambaranga run. He is strong still in his resolution to keep from temptation, but one look at the homestead and the house she lives in he must have, if it costs him his life.

They come to a spot where a short cut strikes off for Ungahrun, and sending Blucher with the pack-horses along it, John keeps towards his own early home. He experiences somewhat of the feeling which may torture a condemned spirit roaming in the vicinity of Paradise.

As he rides through the thick wattles which line the road, he meets a man with a pack-horse. It is the station ration-carrier. John has too often performed the same work not to know his appearance. A few hasty questions are answered in a manner which relieve and yet disappoint him. Mr Cosgrove is at home, but his daughter is not. She is staying at Betyammo, and the man does not know when she will return.

John rides on with less interest and a slight attack of his old gnawing pain. Fitzgerald is doubtless at Betyammo. Now he is in view of the well-known head-station. There is the well-remembered woolshed. It seems only yesterday since he and Stone visited it for the first time. There lies the garden, and the little creek which joins its waters with the main stream. Can so many years have flown by since his eyes first rested on the scene? Yonder is Ruth's mother's grave,—she must often go there. He will for once kneel where she has knelt, and then he will depart. He will risk his peace of mind no further. Quietly he crosses over to the spot which his memory inseparably connects with her he loves. It is much

the same as when he left it. The railing and headstone which John had put up about her mother's grave are still there, but there is a look of trim neatness about it which shows that loving hands have been lately at work. How rapidly his heart is beating! His boyhood's memories flow over him. He remembers how fervently his own father strove to ward from him the ills of life, and as he kneels under the great currajong-tree his mind becomes absorbed in the past.

. . . . . .

Fitzgerald had in vain sought an opportunity to converse with Ruth in private, for with an amount of clever tact and skilful manœuvring which astonished herself, she had hitherto managed to evade and put off the scene which she felt was inevitable. She liked the Ungahrun squatter much as a friend, and the thought of the pain which she knew was in store for him distressed her greatly. Day by day she felt that the approach of the dreaded hour was drawing nearer, and that the crisis was alone postponed by herself.

She had one day taken advantage of a rumoured absence of Fitzgerald from home to canter over and visit her Betyammo friends, when to her surprise she found her lover there before her. He had turned up in some unaccountable way, as he often did about that time. Strange coincidences seemed to multiply themselves in connection with him. This time, his face wore a look of resolution, and his general air gave so much evidence of determination, that Ruth trembled. She felt sure the time for an explanation had come. Still she struggled to delay it. Insisting that her step-father could not spare her, she announced her intention next morning of returning to Cambaranga; and waylaying Mr Gray privately, she begged that he would accompany her back. It was, however, no use. Fitzgerald saddled his horse, deaf to

all hints, and joined the party. Ruth resolutely kept by Mr Gray's bridle-rein most of the way, and it was not until within a short distance from the station that the casual encounter of an intimate and loquacious friend of the old squatter's gave Fitzgerald the opportunity he sought for. In a few straightforward and manly words he said all he had to say; and earnestly he made offer of his love, and promised to shield and guard her, as his heart's most sacred treasure, through life. His utterance had been so rapid that Ruth, whose tears fell fast, was quite unable to stem its torrent. She shook her head, and was endeavouring to decline the offer as gently as she could, when the loud greeting whinny of a horse startled them both. It stood tied up to a sapling near her mother's grave, and the sound had the effect of causing its owner to rise hastily from where he had been kneeling and gaze in their direction.

He stood bareheaded—a tall, muscular, well-built figure, in rough bush attire, his auburn beard and hair powdered with the dust of travel, gazing at them with a frightened stare on his bronzed aquiline features.

"John West!" cried Fitzgerald, in delighted surprise.

Darkly red flushed the weather-beaten face, a tempest of rage for an instant seemed to pass over the strongly marked countenance, but only for a moment. The next minute he had sprung on his horse and was galloping away, excitedly waving his hands. Whither? —he knew and cared not.

Ruth's tears had stopped with the surprise, but now they welled faster than ever; and Fitzgerald's surprise at his friend's strange conduct but increased their flow. Attributing her emotion to the same cause which had first occasioned it, Fitzgerald would have renewed his suit, but was excitedly, almost passionately, interrupted by Ruth, who incoherently begged him to desist; and on reaching the head-station she hurried to her chamber, in which she shut herself up, reso-

lutely refusing to see any one, not excepting her step-father and old Mr Gray, who feared that she had been attacked by a sudden indisposition.

Fitzgerald wandered about in a maze of astonishment, at one time canvassing his friend's behaviour, and next moment that of his mistress.

Night, however, brought counsel, and in the morning Ruth met him with a calm face; and while stating her appreciation of the proposal he had made to her, and her own deep sense of his private worth, firmly declined accepting it, causing that gentleman's visage to assume an expression of more puzzled amazement than it had ever worn before. In vain he would have expostulated. Mildly, but decidedly, she put an end to further entreaties by informing him that to her the subject was of so painful a nature that its further discussion could only wound without changing her feelings.

In desperation Fitzgerald applied for advice, first to Mr Gray, and then to Mr Cosgrove, the latter appeal to him a most distasteful proceeding.

Both shrugged their shoulders helplessly, and Fitzgerald rode home by himself that afternoon, a very much sadder man than when he left it, vainly seeking some explanation of so bewildering a state of things.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN OLD FRIEND—TO THE DIGGINGS.

INSTINCTIVELY the old Ungahrun horse bore his rider along the road towards his home, and several miles were travelled at the rapid pace they had started at, before John West's mind returned to its former balance. His travel-worn nag, however, giving signs of fatigue, induced him to draw the rein, and proceed at a more rational pace. A whirlwind of various emotions had swept over him within the last half-hour, and revealed to him the true state of his feelings. Peace of mind was only to be obtained by flight. He dared not stay. He could not bear it. Philosophy was nowhere. As he rode along, he overtook a young man on horseback driving a couple of pack-horses before him, in company with Blucher. He had no wish for conversation, and calling to the latter, was about to pass with a quiet good-day, when the blackboy, who, having partaken of the stranger's mid-day meal, had all at once become on very intimate terms with him, remarked,—

"This one white fellow been know you along o' Ingland, Missa West."

John looked at the stranger, but failed to recognise him.

"It is so long ago," said the traveller, "that I don't wonder at your forgetting me; and indeed, but for your blackboy, I would not have known you. I am Ned, the boy that was in Mr Cosgrove's service, whom

you protected from that bully Cane, the stable lad." John's thoughts flew back to England, and he remembered a lad, whom he had often saved at his personal peril from the rough bullying of Bill Cane, and who, on his departure, had presented him with his faithful Spot,—the poor dog whose death by snake-bite has already been related. "I have been round here two or three times to ask for you, sir, since I came to Australia, which I did about five years ago, for I kept thinking of you, and wishing I could meet you, but you always happened to be absent when I passed."

West felt much gratified that the boy's love should have remained so true, and kindly shaking hands with him, inquired his history.

It turned out that, from the time of young West's departure, one thought had taken possession of Ned, and that was to go out to the country where his protector resided, and if possible join him there. An opportunity as a stable-boy in charge of some stud cattle on board a ship had offered, and Ned had jumped at the chance. A year or two had been spent in station work, but a gold-field having broken out, the lad had forsaken steady employment to become a "wandering digger."

Two or three attempts he had made, when travelling across the country from one rush to another, to find his patron, but hitherto he had been unsuccessful, and at present he was on his way forth to try his luck at a fresh field, the report of which had lately reached him in a letter from one of his former digging mates.

He had been doing very well on the field which he had just left, his claim was turning him in about an ounce and a half of gold a-week, but the "yellow fever" proved too strong for him, as it did for most diggers. The news of the distant rush left him no peace. With the digging community green fields are always

at a distance, and the further away the greener. He felt constrained to go, so selling his claim for what it would bring, he started for the hitherto but little known regions in which the "new rush" was situated.

John had been tempted more than once to visit a gold-field, and seek his fortune in the bowels of the earth, but had hitherto refrained, from the feeling that such a life, once begun, would be difficult to relinquish. He knew that men slaved away all their lives in seeking for the big prize which never turned up, and in following the Will-o'-the-wisp light which induces them to forsake settled homes, and comforts, for the phantom of independence. He had often been warned that a digger's life once commenced left a man unsettled ever after. He knew that for one lucky individual there were three or four hundred unsuccessful ones, and that the gold extracted from the earth is acquired only at the expense of an equivalent, and often much larger sum, brought on to the field, by those who seek for it, and who lose their little all in doing so. He was acquainted with all this, but in his present desperate condition he reasoned not. He had no ties to keep him back. No one would grieve, should he disappear among the crowd of miners whose ranks were being swelled day by day by individuals such as himself. He had some money. He had found an experienced and faithful work-fellow. He would try digging. He could not be more unsuccessful at it than he had already been.

He camped with his newly found companion, and after a sleepless night, spent in debating with himself on the wisdom of the step he meditated taking, he astonished Ned with the information, that he had decided to go to the rush, and offered to join him as a mate.

Ned, to tell the truth, was so taken aback by the suddenness of the intimation, that at first he almost

doubted whether his old friend and protector was in possession of his senses; but on finding nothing he had to say could shake the resolution which the other had formed, he expressed his satisfaction, and eagerly welcomed him as a companion.

He was aware that his diggings' experience had put him in a position in which he could be of much use to his new mate, and he longed to make a return for the kindness shown to him in former days, the memory of which continually called forth his gratitude.

Blucher was sent home with a short note for Fitzgerald, announcing that circumstances had arisen to prevent John's return to Ungahrun, for some time at least, and the two diggers struck aside into a road leading northwards towards the "New Rush."

The change of life and the fresh hopes by which he was animated, helped our hero greatly in overcoming the troubled state of his mind. His failing courage revived, and newer and grander castles in the air built themselves up, step by step, as he approached the El Dorado of his hope. Somehow he felt as if he really was to be a lucky one. Others might fail; he met hundreds who had been digging all their lives, and who had not yet found the big nugget which they had never ceased looking for since first they began their wearisome labour, nevertheless it did not come home to him. He felt that it would be different with him. Confidence once more steeled his nerves, and glorious hope pointed onward to renewed struggle and victory. Ned had treated him with much respect from the beginning, and would have constituted himself a kind of body-servant, but that John firmly resisted such deference, and stipulated that their conduct to each other was to be based on terms of brotherly equality,—terms which Ned found it very hard to observe, but which John was inexorable in maintaining. Indeed, as they journeyed along, their mutual liking increased with the necessity for little

kindnesses and attentions, and Ned's enthusiasm would have led him almost to death's door to serve his mate and friend, who never spared himself in any wise.

Fresh horses and pack-saddles had been bought; rations, picks, shovels, and tin dishes purchased; and they made their way very comfortably among the crowds steering along the roads, all bound for the new diggings. Outfits of all sorts, and of the strangest kinds, could be seen in the motley throng. Here a party of footmen tramped along with their swags rolled up on their backs, and their tin-billies in their hands. There half-a-dozen followed in the rear of an old horse, bearing the united packs and rations of the party. Now and then a tilted cart, drawn by three or four horses, would be overtaken, containing the owner's family and effects, and followed by a few gaunt-looking kangaroo dogs. Sometimes they passed a drove of fat cattle or a few laden teams, all making their way towards the common focus. Occasionally well-mounted and equipped diggers, with plenty of spare horses, pushed rapidly along; and now and again a helpless-looking creature, without blankets or food, and evidently depending upon what he could beg or borrow, was left behind by them. Once or twice they came upon a couple of stalwart navvies, carrying their possessions on a hand-barrow between them, and on one occasion they passed an eccentric individual, wheeling his worldly goods in a barrow, his nether man enveloped for the sake of coolness and ease in a woman's petticoat. All carried firearms of one sort or another, from the ancient Queen Anne musket and flintlock pistol to the latest invention in breechloading and repeating rifles and revolvers, and every one seemed animated by the desire to reach the new field as soon as possible.

Each night the neighbourhood of the water camped at assumed the appearance of a little canvas village,

which disappeared like magic with the morning's light Daily, return diggers were met who, after having overcome every obstacle and travelled the weary journey, became disgusted with the unfamiliar outward look of the country as soon as they arrived, and turned their backs on it, without ever having put pick in the ground or washed a dish of dirt, convinced that, because the features of the land were unknown to them, it was impossible that gold could exist. The unfavourable reports of these turnbacks were, however, little heeded by the still onward pressing stream, who possessed more or less reliable sources of information in the shape of private letters from trusted and experienced mates, or relations and friends,—for diggers keep up a constant communication with each other.

After about a month's steady travelling, they arrived at the outskirts of the chief township of the diggings to which they were bound. For a few miles before the travellers caught sight of the buildings, trees denuded of their bark for roofing purposes had warned them of their proximity to the main camp. Innumerable horse-bells tinkled everywhere, and here and there little white tents marked the temporary habitations of men whose business had led them to the township.

Descending a cleared ridge, dotted all over with the stumps of trees whose trunks and branches had been used for firewood, the two mates came in sight of a miserable, dilapidated-looking village, composed of one wide street, full of tree stumps, enclosed between two rows of ricketty, patched, tumble-down dwellings. The "humpies," for houses they cannot be called, are of all shapes of architecture, and are formed of the materials which come readiest to hand. The great object seems to be the securing of a dry roof overhead. Most of them have their walls formed of saplings, and are covered in with bark. Many there are, however,

roofed with calico. Some, indeed, are composed of calico altogether, and one or two of the more pretentious are protected overhead with sheets of zinc, which has done duty on half the goldfields in the colony. A long strip of white calico on most of the buildings in the place bears, in black letters, the intimation that the miserable apology for a dwelling to which it is affixed, rejoices in the sounding title of the "Great Australian Hotel," or the "Royal," or "Empire," or some other such name, and that its owner is licensed to sell all kinds of wines and spirits, &c. The rest of the town is made up of "General Stores," a couple of butchers' shops, and a couple of horse-shoeing forges, built in the same style, together with a number of peculiar looking tenements, consisting partly of tilted carts, sheets of bark, calico, &c., the whole having a tattered, dirty, rabbit-hutch air about them. Many of these are sly grog shanties, doing a thriving trade,—for it is a peculiarity about some men that they rather drink inferior grog at a high price in opposition to the laws of the country, than consume their liquor in comparative safety, in accordance with existing regulations.

The little township is very full of men at present, but only few are to be seen on the so-called "street." All hands are either in the public-houses, stores, &c., or are at work in the neighbourhood. In each of the miserable-looking horse stockyards, at the back of the various hotels, are standing a few saddled and bridled hacks. The tucked-up bellies and sick looks of one or two of them, betray that they have been awaiting thus their owners' pleasure to depart since morning, perhaps all night. The ricketty enclosures which surround the back kitchens and outhouses are one mass of broken bottles and sardine tins, over which run in some instances large pumpkin vines, thriving luxuriantly among the filth and rubbish out of which they have sprung. Now and then

a dirty drunken individual, with disordered dress, and uncovered unkempt hair, bleared eyes, and sodden vacant features, staggers about unmeaningly, or stretches himself on the ground. Two or three horses saddled and packed stand hitched up to the posts in front of the various stores and public-houses. Sitting on a bench outside the principal hotel are three or four hopelessly abandoned loafers, wearing plainly the stamp of "deadhead" on their shameless features, waiting to be asked to drink, or listening eagerly for the not infrequent, "shout for all hands." Inside the bar stands in front of a row of brilliantly labelled and capsuled bottles and gorgeously painted kegs, a rough knowing-looking fellow, exerting himself to the utmost in supplying the wants of a crowd of customers who fill the rude drinking shop. The few spare moments between the different orders for drinks he devotes to giving the already used "nobbler tumblers" a slight rinse, and a hasty wipe with the corner of a much used towel, or in adroitly pretending to undo for the first time the capsule of a bottle of "Martell," or "Hennessey," which in all probability he himself has fastened on a day or two before, after filling the empty bottle with some noxious compound of his own manufacture. He knows every one, and every one knows him by his Christian name. Each time drinks are called for, he is included. He cannot drink "hard stuff," however, always. His business would suffer. He has a private bottle filled with tea, from which he fills his glass after receiving payment. He is the centre of information. He is able to tell every one about their old mates and acquaintances, how they are doing, where they are working, and when they are likely to be next in the township. Most of the diggers are discussing the merits of the various creeks and gullies where they have been at work. One or two are exhibiting a collection of nuggets and rough gold, which they carry about with

them in chamois-leather bags in their trousers pockets. At the other end of the bar, the publican's wife, tricked out in her best, is displaying her charms for the benefit of a horsey-looking sharper, who has earned a doubtful reputation for pluck and fastness. He has already "done" his two years for horse-stealing, and one or two partners in mining speculations and other enterprises curse the hour they came across him. He is sitting on a cask in a corner, his expensive and beautifully-coloured meerschaum in full swing, playing on an accordion, at which accomplishment he is somewhat of a dab. The publican himself is too busy to attend to details. He is constantly on the road between the diggings and the port, getting up supplies, or taking down gold to the bank; he leaves his business at home to the bar-keeper and his wife.

Some day there may come a smash. The business may fail, and the barman may set up a more flourishing trade himself; and the gay wife may disappear into obscurity with the horsey accordion-player. It has happened before. In a little adjoining room, half filled with casks, some men are playing at cards, and in the doorway two are quarrelling over some bygone grievance. Presently their mutual recriminations end in a fight, and all hands rush outside to see the combatants. Strong muscular fellows, stripped to the waist, slogging away at each other with determined fury, and rolling on the hard ground and tree roots with their tender white skins, as the chances of the fight vary.

Everywhere the same scenes may be observed. Men keep coming, and others departing. Bullock-drays arrive laden, and depart empty. The first place newcomers make for is, in nine cases out of ten, one of the public-houses. A few of the steadier go to the stores. These are also full of men, some preparing for a start out to the workings. Others there are who, having a day or two to spare, prefer the quiet of the

stores to the noise of the public-houses; and there are one or two yellow-looking fever patients, who have come to the township to recruit on fresh beef and vegetables after a severe attack of illness. Every kind of article likely to be wanted by a digging population is kept in stock. Picks, shovels, tin dishes, quart-pots, sardines, jams, pickles, potted meats, blankets, bellows, hats, boots, slops, flour, tea, sugar, rice, tobacco, salt, gunpowder, and a hundred other necessaries, are piled up in heaps. Diggers are busy buying what they want, paying at the counter for their purchases in gold dust, of which each seems to possess a stock more or less. Others are discussing the particulars of various rushes to different parts of the field, or narrating to each other the history of the patch which "Jim the Sailor" dropped on to so unexpectedly, or which "Brandy Bill" struck, with his persistent good luck,—for there seems to be a prevailing feeling that good fortune always attends the most worthless and reckless characters. The two blacksmiths' shops which the little place boasts of are full of horses waiting to be shod. The butchers are busy cutting up into steaks the last pieces of the bullock they have hung up in their shops. There are two rival meat establishments, and they have already disposed of two whole carcases each this morning, in the form of steaks and roasting-pieces, and they are again preparing to slaughter another apiece this evening to supply the demand for beef. In fact, everybody is busy, and the signs of bustle and drunkenness denote that all are doing well, and that gold is plentiful.

Ned and West dismount at the door of one of the largest stores. It is kept by a young fellow who has followed the business of a diggings storekeeper for many years, and whose cautious industry has been rewarded by much patronage and popularity among the miners. It is no easy matter to keep on good terms with so arbitrary and independent a set of cus-

tomers; and diggings storekeepers, who, as a rule, are a persevering, straightforward, honest set of men, earn hardly all they make. Ned has known and dealt with the storekeeper on several other fields, and receives the welcome of an old friend. The storekeeper informs them where they may find a good patch of feed for their horses, and insists on their putting up the first night with him in the store. Swags are brought inside, horses are hobbled out, and the travellers have barely time to put things in order, when a great bell is rung at the door of the chief hotel next door, and a crowd of hungry miners make their way into the large apartment used as an eating-room. It is rather a picturesque sight to see so many rough bearded figures, each dragging a gun or rifle about, which he leans against the wall close to him. Nor is the display of firearms a mere show. Only last week a man was speared and killed in returning to his tent from the butcher's shop, where he had gone to buy meat for his supper. A second and third dinner is served before all the ravenous constituents are supplied, and the afternoon is spent sitting on the flour bags in the store, listening to those details of the peculiarity of the goldfield, and the character of the workings, so interesting to all diggers. After supper they stroll through the buildings, and visit one public-house and store after another. All are full of men drinking and smoking.

This is the "Diggers' Arms." A group of miners are collected at the bar, listening to the singing of a rather good-looking but dissipated and reckless character. He is well known all over the country. He distinguished himself in early life as a brave sailor, since when he has had numberless good chances offered to him, but has ever disgraced himself and his patrons. He trolls out a rollicking sea song, in a street-ballad-singer's voice, for the benefit of the company, in expectation of the "shout" which is sure to follow. In

another, the only hotel which boasts of a billiard-table, John recognises with extreme pain, in the bloated face of the billiard-marker, his shipmate "Boyle," who came to the country as "manager of a station." He has sunk low enough now. He taps Ned on the shoulder, and they leave the place together Nearly all the "humpies" and huddled-up hovels have an open fire burning near them, encircled with pots, buckets, and dishes, for the purpose of cooking. As they pass one of these shanties, from which proceeds the sound of drunken merriment, the noise of uncontrollable laughter from the fire attracts their attention. It is very dark, and standing in the shade they observe the prostrate figure of an intoxicated white man on the ground, among the cooking utensils. In his maudlin restlessness he turns ever and anon, allowing his nerveless arm to stretch itself so that the fingers fall in the red hot embers, from which he rescues them with a sudden shake, caused by the intense pain, which provokes a burst of amusement each time it is repeated from a delighted blackboy, who is comfortably ensconced in his blankets a little way off enjoying the scene. It is useless to say anything to the boy, so dragging the unhappy man to a safer distance, they pass on.

This is the "Emerald Isle Hotel." They glance in at the door to observe a broth of a boy from County Tipperary squatted on his hams on the floor, in which position he is executing, amid fearful howls and encouraging exclamations, a kind of war dance, which requires no small degree of agility and strength. "Go it, Jerry! Jerry's a terror!" shout the admiring crowd.

"Come along," says Ned, "we've had enough of that."

The next place they enter is a rather quiet public-house, kept by a Chinaman who has acquired the name of selling good liquor. He is patronised by the authorities of the goldfield, when they leave the Government

camp and pay a visit to the township. To-night the commissioner of the field and one or two friends sit at the little table in the quiet bar-parlour. There has been a meeting for some purpose, at which he has presided, and he is surrounded by a number of diggers, who enjoy being in the society of the great man, who is also nothing loth to purchase popularity cheaply. He is telling them a story about his own digging life. Listen! He and some of his mates discovered a good payable creek on a diggings many years ago, and to prevent others following his tracks, and participating in the spoil, he set fire to the grass behind him. (He will give his audience a classical allusion, it will raise him in their estimation.) It puts him in mind of that great general of old, who on invading an enemy's country set fire to his shipping. "Who was it?" he asks himself, tapping his forehead for inspiration. One voice suggests Julius Cæsar, another Cortes. "No," says the scholar reflectively,—"no, it wasn't either of them;" then, as if a ray of light had suddenly fallen upon him, he inquires, "Wasn't it Apollo?"

Returning to the friendly storekeeper's, the two mates are about to turn in, but alas! they woo Morpheus in vain. They are situated between the chief public-house and the abode of a rival storekeeper, who is subjected to periodical fits of intoxication, and he has just entered upon one of these paroxysms. He invariably commences, so their host states, by driving his wife out of doors, and to-night the poor woman is seeking a home where she can. He is particularly distinguished for the marvellous facility with which he can coin strange oaths and wicked expressions, as well as for the enduring loquacity, which characterises him day and night, without intermission. His conversation and remarks are chiefly addressed to his wife. He is at present sitting with a rifle at the open window, upbraiding her with not having courage enough to come

and be shot. Occasionally he relieves his feelings by howling after the manner of a native dog. The noise from the public-house on the other side is almost equally loud, though of a more varied character, and John West vowed that his first night passed in the midst of a digging township should be the last, if he could help it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE GOLD QUEST.

THE alluvial ground in the immediate vicinity of the township had been worked out over and over again, and was now haunted only by the few who had neither means nor spirit to enable them to pierce the as yet unexplored regions farther away. It was therefore decided upon by Ned, who had been indefatigable in collecting information from all sources, that he and his comrade should make their way out to the outskirts of the goldfield, and try their luck on some of the latest discovered gold-producing creeks.

There being as yet no other spot at which rations could be procured, they replenished their stock from the friendly storekeeper's supply, and loading all their beasts, including even their own riding horses, to the utmost, they started on foot for the particular creek on which they had resolved to set in to work.

Wild and savage the country looked as they pursued their solitary way along a little path for some distance from the township, and still wilder and more inhospitable it grew, as, leaving the traces of human existence, they plunged into the rocky mountainous barren forest, in which signs of animal life were rarely met with. Now and then they encountered small parties of miners, rough, bronzed, and ragged-looking, making their way towards what to them, after their silent solitary lives, must have appeared a stirring busy city.

Following the directions given them, in a few days they arrived at the particular creek for which they were bound, a dark uninteresting little valley, through which ran, in a chain of shallow waterholes, a small sandy creek. On a little flat were pitched a few tents, and the banks of the creek were being broken into by a number of stalwart diggers, armed with picks and shovels. Here and there might be seen men sitting at the edge of waterholes, tin dish in hand, swilling the wash-dirt round and round, with the object of allowing the golden particles from their weight to sink to the bottom, and thus get separated from the earthy matter, which was permitted to escape over the side of the dish.

Their tent was soon erected, and a piece of ground selected and pegged out, and daybreak next morning found them hard at work, and hard uncompromising work it was. The banks of the stream had to be cut away with solid heavy pick-and-shovel labour, until the wash-dirt (lying upon the clayey substratum) containing the gold was reached. This had to be carefully bagged up and conveyed to the water's edge, after which it had to be washed in the manner previously described, and which required no little skill and endurance, the whole day's work very often not producing enough to pay for rations. A succession of weeks of unrewarded labour decided them upon striking their camp and wooing fortune on fresh grounds. Their intention was no sooner known in the little camp, than the deserted spot occupied by their canvas habitation was measured off and appropriated by some fresh arrivals, who at once commenced to sink a hole for luck as they phrased it, on the very site hitherto used by them as a fireplace, and where they had sat together night after night discussing their cheerless prospects. Away they wandered again without having any definite place of residence in view. Sometimes they tried one place, anon another, as fancy led them.

In one gully success in a limited degree would keep them working for weeks, in the hope that by dint of persistent work a reward for their labour would ultimately await them. In another and more likely looking spot, utter barrenness seemed to prevail.

John West's hopes had brightened up exceedingly on seeing the evidences of so great a plenty of the precious metal at the Township, but he forgot that only the lucky ones could afford a visit to that centre of the hard-working community, and that hundreds upon hundreds earned barely enough to keep them going from day to day.

His digging experience was so limited, that he was unable to believe it possible that poverty could exist on a great goldfield. He was unaware that, on the celebrated fields of "Bendigo" and "Ballarat" (where large fortunes were made every day by the turning of a shovel), as much misery and want could be witnessed as in any of the great cities of Europe.

An extract, dated June 8, 1878, taken from the 'Queenslander,'[1] will illustrate the kind of life they led at this period:—

" . . . The country itself and the population peculiarly favour the raids of hostile blacks. Geologists tell us that Northern Queensland was once covered by a dense coating of desert sandstone or conglomerate. On the great watersheds of the Flinders and Cloncurry this overlying mass has been denuded by the currents and atmospheric agencies of bygone ages. Downs which rejoice the heart of the pastoral tenant, nourish on their monotonous surface fat beeves, where once the wallaby and wallaroo coursed through rocky defiles; but the source of the Gilbert more slowly yields to the same influences, and maintains its primeval character of sterile rock and savage grandeur. The river itself is a fit prototype of its innumerable

[1] Published weekly in Brisbane, Queensland. An ably-conducted journal, of which the population of the colony are justly proud.

branches. A broad bed of sand winds its tortuous course through overhanging cliffs of conglomerate, falling here and there, where the process of disintegration has been more complete, into low rises, covered with pebbly wash, and intersected by veins of the strata underlying the conglomerate, slate, diorite, &c. Sometimes on the banks of the main river, more frequently in the ravines running therein, nearly always at the heads of the tributaries and lesser creeks, wherever the slate has been exposed, and the auriferous strata are uncovered, the colour of gold is found. Under favourable conditions—that is to say, where the denudation has been complete, the process of removal extensive, and the bars of diorite supposed to contain gold-bearing leaders sufficiently pierced, and the slate fully bared—payable deposits of gold are struck, rarely, if ever, bearing any similarity except in the conditions under which they are found. In size, form, and value, the precious metal within a limited area will present great diversities. Sometimes the leader from which the gold is presumably discharged could be identified if it were not that specimens of entirely opposite character, embedded in distinct forms of quartz, were found lying side by side. Sometimes the gold is free from quartz, sometimes embedded in greenstone, sometimes combined both with greenstone and quartz, sometimes with quartz alone. Often it is as fine as flour; again it will range from 'colours' to nuggets of several ounces. It may be worth only £2, 18s. per ounce; it may, and does, assay £3, 18s. and £4. No rule can be laid down; and in one case at least the purchaser has one invariable price, which protects him from much loss on the inferior samples, and leaves an ample margin of profit on the better class. The best patches are got in ravines a few hundred feet in length, where a narrow gutter of two or three feet contains the payable gold. The mouth is not unusually poor; the extreme head of the ravine is also worthless; but occasionally the gold is traced through the exposed slate right up to the conglomerate—in fact, to points where the beetling cliffs have covered the bed with such masses that the labour of removing them could not be paid by the gold won. In no instance has the discovery of gold in the conglomerate *in situ* been authenticated,

though careless observers who have got gold in conglomerate *débris* may deny the assertion.

"In this region nature maintains a fitting solitude. The glaring cliffs drop down from a table-land where the cypress pine surges mournfully in the breeze, half-starved dingoes wake the echoes of the hills by their nightly serenades, and a few blacks roam from creek to creek and gorge to gorge, finding, in the innumerable caves into which the soft substance is excavated, safe harbour and concealment after a raid on the plains below. To this region must one come to see the fossieker in all his miserable state. Travelling in pairs, but usually working separately, the true gambusino of the north is found. Each boils his separate billy and provides his frugal fare; each pitches his solitary tent; each works when and how disposed; each roams the ravines adjacent in search of some hidden store; and only when an abundance of water and cradling dirt convenient points out the mutual benefit do the two combine and share the joint proceeds. Inducement for such a life is hard to find. Every pound of food has to be packed from fifty to a hundred miles. Salt meat is necessarily the sole form in which meat can be provided. Day after day, week after week, the patient fossieker tries creek after creek, gully after gully, ravine after ravine, with the same result; the monotonous 'colour,' or, worse still, the occasional presence of a coarse speck, encouraging the delusion of better things. But allow unwonted success to have attended research. The dirt is payable, the site not more than a quarter of a mile from water, and, by unremitting toil, from two pennyweights to a rarely-attained millenium of an ounce a-day can be made. What is the *rationale* of proceeding? No sooner has a permanent camp been pitched than watchful eyes have marked the smoke. Every movement from the camp is noted. Every dish of dirt has to be picked in a hollow admirably adapted to conceal approaching footsteps. Huge masses of rock hang within spear's throw of the unsuspecting miner. The hard and stony ground hides all vagrant tracks except to the most experienced. Every pound of dirt has to be borne on the back over spinifex, or through grasses shedding barbed seeds directly they are touched. It has to be

washed beneath a glaring sun, aided by all kinds of winged tormentors; and hour by hour, nay, every second, there is the same uneasy consciousness that bloodthirsty and vengeful eyes are upon you, and that to relinquish your gun for a minute may cost you your life."

Such was the nature of the arduous unrewarded pursuits which the two companions carried on at this period. They had been nearly twelve months seeking their "fortune" in this manner, and what little gold they had succeeded in obtaining had melted away, along with a large portion of John's slender capital, in providing rations and in replacing a couple of horses which had fallen victims to the spears of the aboriginals. Our hero about this time had undertaken a journey into the township to purchase a fresh stock of rations and necessary supplies, leaving his mate alone behind him in the desolate wilderness, whither their work had drawn them, to find him on his return (about ten days afterwards) prostrate, a victim to a severe attack of malarious fever. How miserably wretched everything looked. The fire had been out for nearly a week. The unfortunate man, utterly exhausted by the enervating disease, had been unable to procure a draught of water, after exhausting the quantity which had filled the bucket when he was first taken ill, and had been at least a couple of days tortured by excruciating thirst. Utterly debilitated, he had looked forward to nothing but death as a release to his sufferings, when the arrival of John again restored a spark of hope to his breast. Unable to move or speak, his eyes, dilated by illness to double their natural size, followed the form of his companion with a trustful look of confidence and affection, which revealed that the drooping spirit had once more taken root and was reviving. The next morning he was better, and some doses of fever mixture,

together with his friend's society, restored the sick man in a few days so far that he was able to sit up and partake of a little of "Liebig's extract,"—a preparation invaluable to those beyond the reach of fresh meat.

During the periodical attacks of delirium which accompanied the fever, Ned had spoken much of a creek beyond the mountains in which he felt sure a rich patch of gold was awaiting them, and which he begged John to join him in prospecting as soon as the weakness which at present prostrated him should allow them to move. West was at first inclined to treat these often-expressed wishes as the whimsical fancies of a sick man which would disappear with renewed health and vigour; but in this he was mistaken. Each day the desire grew stronger in the now convalescent patient; and as the spot in which they were then working offered no great inducement for them to prolong their stay, they started, making towards the distant range of high hills, which were visible from the pallet where Ned had lain during so many weary days alone in his despair and misery.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PROSPECTING—THE BOWERS OF THE BOWER-BIRD—DANGERS—NEMESIS.

ON all diggings there is a class of men who, impatient of steady, constant labour, devote themselves to the exploring of hitherto unworked and untrodden ground. These men are distinguished by the name of "Prospectors," and to their indefatigable energy and experienced skill has been due, in many cases, the opening up of new and valuable auriferous tracts. Among these men are to be met some of the most intelligent and brave of the hardy miners of the north, and very frequently they earn but a poor reward for the perils and hardships which they undergo. Too often it happens that they act the jackal's share in pointing out the prey to the lion "population," and that in the rush which follows they come off but second best, notwithstanding the regulations of the gold-fields, by which the discoverers of a new and payable field are entitled to a certain reward, sometimes in money, and at others in extended claims, or both, according to the ideas of the Government which at the time may be in power. These prospectors go in well-equipped parties of from three to six, horsed, armed, and provisioned at their own expense, and make flying tours over a vast extent of territory, working a day here, another there, settling for a fortnight at times in one place, and again travelling without intermission for weeks over unlikely-looking ground. Sup-

posing them to have been successful in discovering a tract containing, to the best of their belief, payable gold, it is required of them, in order to obtain the Government reward and protection for the area chosen by them to be worked on their own account, that they shall, on coming in, make a full report to the Gold Commissioner nearest to the spot, whose duty it is at once to start back with them, to examine and report on the field for Government information. An immense number of eager diggers follow the return party, all flushed with the hopes of gain. Should these prove fallacious, and the workings be found poor, an excitement more or less tumultuous generally succeeds, and the unreasoning and disappointed crowd usually turn their thoughts towards hanging, or at least lynching, the unfortunate prospectors, who in all probability have been the greatest losers by the transaction themselves.

Other prospectors there are of a less ambitious nature. They have no desire that their names shall descend to posterity in connection with their discoveries. They are secret and cautious. They confine their explorations within a circle of from fifty to a hundred miles outside the known area of the diggings, and mostly go in pairs. Should they chance to alight upon a payable creek, gully, or ravine, they set to work quietly to extract as much of the precious metal as possible from the soil before they can be discovered, preferring the chance of what they can get to the questionable benefit of a Government reward, with its contingent annoyances. Sometimes it happens that a few of the roughs and horse thieves, of whom there are always plenty about every diggings township, make up a party to prospect, in the hope of alighting upon some easily-worked heavy deposit of gold, or discovering a camp of men who have done so, and thus sharing cheaply in the benefits resulting from their skill and research. It does not take this

class of prospectors long to equip themselves. They are acquainted with the whereabouts of almost every horse of any value on the field. Their nights are spent in driving them away and hiding them, and their days in bringing them back after a sufficiently large reward has been offered by the anxious owners. They easily get a supply of rations on credit from the various storekeepers, who, fearful of their possible resentment, are glad to get rid of them for a time on any terms. Horses begin to disappear, and all of a sudden the little township is forsaken temporarily by a number of scoundrels who have infested it, and made honest men uneasy about their property. It is impossible to follow them: they are thorough bushmen, and have taken every precaution against pursuit. The white constables, stiff and slow in their movements, are nowhere beside the quick-witted rogues who, once mounted, defy the clumsy horsemen of the law. Now and again reports are brought into camp about them by men who have seen them in various places, and a general uneasiness as to horseflesh and security of property prevails.

John West and Ned were prospectors of the secret and cautious class. Our hero could not bear the idea of working among the common herd for a bare livelihood. He had set his all upon the hazard of the die, and he felt that on working on the outside there was a chance which possibly might turn up trumps some day. He was, in fact, leading a gambler's existence; and the expedition on which they had just started, although Quixotic from many points of view, afforded them quite as good an opening for success as any other they might undertake. In this spirit he pursued his way, quietly listening to, though without participating in, the sanguine prophecies of his companion, who, since his attack of fever, appeared to have acquired a double stock of energy. In one or two places they came upon ravines which gave promise

of returning a substantial and easy reward for labour, and John began to doubt whether it was wise in him to pass them unheeded. Some one might drop on their tracks, and in following them, discover and profit by their folly and neglect. Any suggestion, however, to halt for a few days produced such an agony of impatience and annoyance, that John, although feeling strongly convinced of the folly of doing so, never failed each time to give way to the imploring entreaties of his comrade, whose great desire appeared to be to get on the other side of the mountains, on whose dark and rugged tops his eyes had dwelt during his recent extremity. Each day as they approached the great range Ned grew more and more silent; and John sometimes felt inclined to think that his mind had become somewhat deranged by his sufferings. With difficulty they surmounted the dark, cypress-clothed, conglomerate hills, and with equal difficulty descended the precipitous rocks on the other side, into a savage, barren, narrow valley, hemmed in between two steep mountain-spurs, the sides of which were covered with stunted palms, grass, trees, and coarse high fern grass. Making their way slowly, they at last emerged upon the half-dried channel of a creek, crossed in places by great bars of slate. The bent and twisted ti-tree and river-oak saplings reveal the fierce character of the mountain torrent during the rainy season. At present its bed is but a glaring, burning ribbon, relieved at intervals by a deep water-hole, which some strong eddy has scooped out of the sandy bed. The surface of the country is strewn with quartz pebbles and boulders; and although not as auriferous looking as some of the places they have passed by, is nevertheless promising.

As they prepare to cross the creek, their attention is attracted by a neat little structure under a few bushes close to them. John recognises it at once, but Ned has never seen one before. It is the bower

of the bower-bird. It is a most interesting little building, and Ned dismounts to examine it. In length it is about two feet. It is open at either end. The walls are composed of small twigs beautifully and carefully interlaced, and are three or four inches thick, rising, and becoming gradually thinner as they do, until they almost meet where they arch overhead. The width of the little summer-house is about a foot. It is not a nest for breeding purposes, but simply a playground — a bower for social intercourse; and here a number of the skilful little architects meet together to amuse themselves. With the view of beautifying their retreat, the bower-birds have collected a large quantity of white pebbles, snail shells, pieces of quartz, crystal, &c., which they have arranged in neat plots at either entrance, and also on the floor in the middle. Suddenly Ned, who has been kneeling down examining the wondrous little edifice, gives a great cry, and starting to his feet, rushes to one of the pack-horses, from the back of which he tears his pick, shovel, and tin dish, and hastening down to the creek, he commences scraping up the drift which has collected in one of the hollows of the slaty bar which crosses its bed. In another instant he has swilled away the sand in a small pool on the rock close by, and is glaring dazedly upon at least an ounce of bright yellow gold at the bottom of his dish. John, who has remained sitting on his horse in a state of speechless surprise at the unaccountable behaviour of his mate, now dismounts and approaches him. Ned hears him not; he is still gazing stupidly on the yellow heap at the bottom of the dish, one glance at which reveals all to John. Without a word, as if stung by some insect, the bite of which compels frantic exertion, he has rushed to the horses and possessed himself of his implements, and in another instant is washing dish after dish of the golden sand, until he has quite a little heap beside

him on a flat stone, and the sun is sinking low in the western sky. He looks up. Ned is hard at work, and the horses are gone. A sudden exclamation to this effect breaks the spell which has bound them, and urged by the necessity of attending to their safety, they both arise and look about them. Their hearts are too full to speak. Their horses are discovered grazing a few hundred yards off, and mechanically the companions unsaddle their animals and fix the camp.

Once more they descend to the scene of their labours. They can hardly believe the evidence of their eyes. Again and again they wash dish after dish, with the same happy result, until darkness compels them to desist. As they sit in their tent after their frugal supper, examining the produce of their day's work, West, who can hardly realise yet that everything is not a dream, suddenly asks: "What made you so determined to prospect over on this side of the ranges, Ned?"

"I don't know," answered the other. "I can't account for it, but when I was lying on my bunk, slowly perishing with fever and thirst, I kept hearing a voice in my ears saying, 'Over the mountains there lies your luck,' until I felt convinced that, could I but once accomplish the journey, I would at last drop on the spot we have been seeking so long. The weaker I grew the stronger became the belief, and at last, with your return, the hope of gratifying the intense longing enabled me to cast sickness behind me. I had thoughts of nothing else. The voice kept ever sounding in my ears, 'Over the mountains,' and as we made our way here, I felt certain that step by step we were nearing our luck."

"But," said West, "what was it that made you try the creek so suddenly? It was a likely enough place, but we have tried hundreds of similar patches unsuccessfully."

"Well," returned Ned, "as I was examining the bower of those wonderful birds, and remarking their taste in laying out their little play-house just like human beings, I happened to take up some of the quartz pebbles which ornamented the entrances to the little wicker abode. *Each one, almost, had a few specks of gold in it.* I heard again the voice, 'Over the mountains there lies your luck,' and then I seized the shovel and dish. I knew I should find it; but it almost took my senses away for all that."

The two friends, excited by their good fortune, continued talking long into the night, and next morning daybreak found them once more working with furious ardour. Day by day the same work, varied with more or less success, caused the hours to pass with the swiftness of minutes, and the little chamois-leather bags were filled to bursting. The first week's work had produced upwards of 250 ounces of a very rich sample of gold. The discovery of a rich ravine, debouching upon the river just above the slatey bar they had first set to work upon, proved of the utmost importance. If they could only work it out in quietness, they would have sufficient to satisfy themselves. It had always been a rule of the two comrades, as indeed it is of most diggers, to rest from their labours on the Sabbath; and in accordance with their usual practice, on the first Sunday after their discovery of the golden bar, they had, after resting during the forenoon, strolled out for a walk. Instinctively they bent their steps towards the neat little bower, to whose busy and tasteful builders they owed so much. There it was, a perfect marvel of ingenuity. As he stooped down to examine the shells and quartz collected with so much care and labour, it occurred to John that, where the quartz specimens were found, others were to be met with. The character of the quartz bore a great resemblance to that of much lying

on the ground and filling the mountain gullies around. Breaking the quartz boulders here and there, they soon collected a heap of specimens of a similar character, all indicating that the main reef or vein from which they had been hurled, or from which the gradual process of denudation had washed them, lay at no great distance. Following these evidences up the mountain slope for about a couple of hundred yards, they came upon a large "blow" or outcrop of quartz, sticking out of the earth, over the surface of which were scattered detached blocks of the same substance. Gold was everywhere embedded in greater or less quantities on the matrix, and valuable specimens were picked up by the friends as they casually explored the ground about.

Returning next morning to the reef, they collected and bagged up the most valuable pieces which they could find, and betook themselves once more to their work in the ravine, determining to return, if spared, at some future period, with the necessary tools and proper appliances for the opening up of the great vein. Nearly three weeks had been passed in uninterrupted labour, and the results of their work had assumed very considerable proportions, when the prospectors were disagreeably disturbed one morning by the presence of natives. They had hitherto been remarkably fortunate in escaping the notice of the denizens of the wilds in which they lived; but on this occasion they received a no less startling than unwelcome notice of trespass in the shape of a spear, which, hurled from behind a few bushes, at a distance of about eighty yards, passed within an ace of Ned's head, as he brought up a bucket of water from the water-hole below the camp. A bullet instantly fired at the treacherous foe, and which struck a tree close to him, causing large pieces of bark to fly off it, had the effect of making him beat a hasty retreat, ducking his head in the most ludicrous way as the reverberations of the report among the

ranges assailed him on every side. From this time forward, however, they had no rest; a horrible uncertainty kept them ever on the watch; and even when reassured to a certain extent by a complete cessation of all annoyance for a couple of days, engendering the hope that their bloodthirsty enemies had left the vicinity of their camp, a *coey* on the mountains, answered in the distance by two or three more, would again awaken the harassing dread which continually haunted them.

The experience of native habits which John had acquired during his squatting life became very useful in this emergency, and enabled them to take measures which had the effect of keeping the blacks at a distance, and of estimating properly their chances of safety and danger. As a matter of precaution, a hole had been dug in the floor of the tent, in which all their treasure had been stowed away, and each night the day's earnings were secretly added to the hoard. Digging became a much more arduous task than formerly. The necessity for being constantly on guard obliged each to take it in turns to act as sentry, day and night,—besides which, their horses proved a source of incessant trouble. Some days before the appearance of the blacks, one of the animals, a restless wandering mare, had strayed away, leading the others with her, and at about six miles' distance had dropped across a patch of young burnt feed, which had ever since remained an irresistible attraction to them. No means adopted to keep them in the neighbourhood of the camp having the desired effect, the searching for them on foot became a really dangerous duty, it being highly imperative that one man should remain to guard the household gods. On discussing their position one evening, after a peculiarly distressing day, and finding that their horses had once more cleared out, the comrades came reluctantly to the conclusion that they could no longer remain in

their camp with any degree of safety. The natives might at any moment take it into their heads to spear their horses, in which case they would have but a slender chance of ever reaching civilisation; or an accidental spear might, causing the death of one of themselves, render the escape of the other next to an impossibility. All things considered, then, they resolved to be contented with what gold they had already secured, and to return as soon as possible, in order to open up the quartz reef, which they regarded as the most valuable of their discoveries. Next morning, therefore, Ned, whose turn it was for that duty, started in order to recover the truant nags, leaving John behind him to guard the camp. Down the rocky creek he took his way, his bridle on his left arm, and his carbine over his shoulder, keeping a sharp look-out for natives. He came to the spot where the horses usually ran; but this time they were not to be seen, although the tracks and manure indicated that they could not have left the place long before. Up and down he searched unsuccessfully, and at length, following the creek some distance down into unknown ground, came upon the junction of a small tributary with it. Fagged and vexed with tramping so many miles over a broken, grass-seedy country, he seated himself to rest for a few minutes on a large granite boulder, but had hardly done so when the approach of a horseman from behind startled him.

"Good day," said the stranger, gruffly. "Prospecting?"

"Yes," returned Ned.

"So ham I. Camp hup the creek?"

"Yes," again replied Ned. "Seen any horses?"

"No," answered the new-comer shortly, turning his horse's head up the little creek which junctioned with the larger one near them.

"I'm looking for some horses," said Ned, "and I'm

fairly knocked up over it. If you see any tracks up the way you're going, you might fire off your carbine to let me know, and I'll come up."

The man rode away, and Ned remained where he was, though without expecting much from his meeting with the horseman, who was evidently a surly-tempered man of few words. Ten minutes had scarcely elapsed, however, when the report of a rifle sounded up the little stream, followed at intervals by half-a-dozen others, and pushing hurriedly along, he caught sight of, and made his way to, his new acquaintance, who was sitting on his horse, on a little knoll some distance above the bank of the creek.

"Where are they?" eagerly inquired Ned, who saw no signs of the wanderers.

"I got two of the ——," returned the man, with a grim, self-satisfied sort of air.

"Where?" asked Ned, looking around. "I don't see any."

"There's one," replied the new prospector, pointing with his carbine to the still warm and bleeding body of a black man lying among the long grass beside him; "the other's in the creek. I came hacross them hunawares, hand 'ad the first hon 'is back hafore 'e know'd where 'e was, but this un giv' me a good deal of bother hafore I dropped 'im."

Ned had no great sympathy for the blacks; he had suffered too much from their enmity, and, if necessary, would not have hesitated in taking their lives in defence of his own; but this cold-blooded procedure filled him with horror.

"Did they not attack you first?" he asked.

"They didn't get the slant this time. The —— wretches halways does when they can, hand I halways serves 'em same way. There's nothing I likes better nor shooting a good hold stinking buck nigger."

Ned looked at the speaker. There was something

about him which recalled some vague recollection, some undefined misty memory of bygone times. He was mounted upon an exceedingly handsome chestnut, with a thorough-bred look, which bespoke pedigree and speed. His air and manner proclaimed him a self-reliant, determined man, unaccustomed to control; but a glance at the coarse round head, and repulsive animal features of the face, revealed the presence of the brutal type of mind of which they are the certain indications. Comment on the action would have been as imprudent as useless, so, with a short farewell, he once more started in pursuit of his stray property, not at all relishing the parting words of the black slayer, who shouted after him that he would look him up at his camp. He had not gone far when he fortunately fell in with the fresh tracks of horses, and shortly afterwards, coming upon the stragglers themselves, he started for the camp.

The announcement to John West that their whereabouts had been discovered was as unwelcome as startling, upsetting, as it necessarily did, all their previous arrangements. It had been their intention, after securing their gold, and providing the necessary tools required by them in quartz-mining, to proclaim the discovery of the golden region, and secure the advantages of the Government reward and protection. It was a simple plan, and one which could not have failed in obtaining for them every advantage they desired, provided that the knowledge of the auriferous country remained their own. It was not to be expected for a moment that any one with the smallest experience of digging could remain ignorant of the rich nature of the alluvial deposits; and it was equally natural to suppose that the new-comers would endeavour to be the first in announcing the find, and claiming the consequent advantages for themselves. On the other hand, it was just possible that a compromise might be effected, and that by the amalgamation

of both parties, all might participate in the golden harvest.

What was to be done? Ned was strongly against having any connection with the bad-featured stranger, for whom he had imbibed a strong dislike. The question was argued in all its bearings by the excited comrades, whose agitation was by no means allayed on seeing a couple of horsemen, with a spare horse or two, arrive about sundown, and proceed to erect a small tent a couple of hundred yards distant from their own. Uneasily after supper they lay for a couple of hours revolving what plan to adopt under the circumstances. Night had again drawn her dark veil across the dismal gloomy territory, upon whose silence the noisy bustle and activity of a practical, self-seeking, struggling world was about to break.

"I'm uneasy about this gold, Ned," said West. "I think we ought to set to work and bag it up properly, so that we can strike camp and be off the moment we choose."

"I think so, too," returned Ned. "The sooner we have it wrapped up the better. I wouldn't like that ugly-looking fellow I came upon to-day to get a look at it."

"Well," proposed John, "let us start to work at once. We can't have a much quieter time."

In a few minutes the precious store was brought forth from its hiding-place, and lay displayed upon the large piece of strong canvas which was intended to envelop it. A noble sight it was, and deeply it stirred the emotions of the men, whose manifold sufferings and labours it but inadequately represented. Silently they gazed for a time, recognising, as they did so, many a well-known piece of coarse metal which had rejoiced their eyes in the finding. Heaving an involuntary sigh, West broke the silence.

"What was that fellow like you met this morning, Ned?"

His companion was about to reply when a step was heard outside the tent, and pulling aside the flap the man himself appeared.

"Hi say, mates, you 'ave a nice little 'eap of the right sort there," he remarked, directing a burning look of cupidity towards the yellow pile on the canvas.

Springing to his feet, and grasping his loaded carbine, with jealous rage depicted in his features, John shouted, "Stand back! What do you want?"

"Oh, nothink," said the intruder; "honly I com'd hon a visit."

"Then," sternly rejoined the young man, by whose side Ned now stood, weapon in hand, "back you go to your own camp. If I catch you about mine after nightfall, I'll drive daylight through you. Those are my rules. Away you go."

Cursing deeply, the surprised and discomfited visitor slunk back to his quarters, the friends watching his retiring figure through the trees by the light of the now rising moon.

"Ned," said West, "that man will never rest until he becomes possessed of the gold there by some means or other, if possible. He's a more dangerous enemy than any black fellow among these ranges. I knew it the moment I saw his eyes fixed on the canvas. I don't know how it is," he continued, "but the sight of him set my blood boiling within me. I seem to know his devil's face somehow."

"So do I," returned Ned; "but I can't think where I saw it."

"Well, no matter; there's but one thing to do now," replied John, whose decision always rose to meet any emergency. "We must endeavour to get away from here to-night, unawares to that fellow. We'll make up the gold and pack the horses (it's lucky you got them to-day), and start back the way we came. We've moonlight; and I'll defy them, or any one else, to track

us over the rocky road we made our way here by, without a blackboy, and then they'd have no easy job."

Armed with his carbine, our hero kept careful watch, while his companion hastily completed the necessary preparations, and by a couple of hours after midnight they had started, leaving the tent standing and a good fire burning beside it, to deceive their neighbours. Slowly but steadily they made their way over the stony precipitous mountains, and only halted for a short time next morning in order to partake of a hasty meal. Daylight enabled the travellers to continue their journey with greater comfort, but their rate of speed was much reduced, owing to more than one of their horses having torn off their shoes in the rocky conglomerate defiles. They camped that night, feeling tolerably secure, from the distance accomplished and the difficult nature of the country they had passed over, taking, nevertheless, the precaution of keeping watch; and three days more brought them by mid-day to a little permanent mining camp, where, for the first time since the night of their flight, they experienced a thorough feeling of safety.

With the absence of the sense of danger, and the return of confidence, a suspicion began to creep over John that perhaps he had been too hasty in his conclusions. How absurd it would look should it turn out, after all, that the man was a well-known character, and as honest as himself! He felt ashamed almost of his behaviour, and was taxing himself with a want of coolness, when Ned, who had been getting the horses shod at the forge, came up, almost breathlessly excited.

"Anything wrong?" asked John.

"Only this," answered his mate: "I saw that fellow who found us out over the mountains, a few minutes ago."

"Are you certain, Ned?" inquired John, all his old suspicion flooding on him in a moment.

"Quite sure," returned he. "I had been speaking to

an old acquaintance, and on returning to the forge I saw him for an instant, talking to one of the men. I could not be mistaken about the face. The moment I entered he went out the back way, and although I followed him instantly, I could not see which road he took."

"Did you ask at the smithy about him?"

"Yes," said Ned; "but nobody knew. All they could tell me was that he inquired when we intended starting."

"I'm more certain than ever that fellow is after our gold," remarked John. "I wish we had it in the Commissioner's strong box. Are the horses finished?"

"Very nearly."

"Well," replied John, "wait here. I'll go up and fetch them, and perhaps I may get a sight of him up at the camp."

He made his way to the forge and got his animals, but no further information could he glean on the subject which disturbed him. As he left the smithy deep in thought, leading the horses along, the loud hearty "Good evening, mate," of a couple of horsemen awoke him from his meditations. The speakers were a couple of burly, bearded miners, their long Californian hats nearly covering their features from view. Each man was leading a spare horse, packed with a small compact swag, and both, it could be seen at a glance, were on their road into town. At first sight John failed to remember under what circumstances he had seen the men before; but at last it flashed upon him that these were the miners who had occupied their deserted ground on the first camp they had settled on, and who had started sinking a shaft in their fireplace for luck.

"Holloa!" he cried, his interest becoming awakened. "Is that you? What luck had you with that old claim of ours?"

"Well," returned one of the diggers, "Bill here and me have been mates this many a year, but taking up that old ground was the best day's work ever we done

together. We took a couple of hundred ounces out of that fireplace, and ever after we couldn't go wrong somehow. They've given us the name of the 'lucky mates.'"

"Many's the time," broke in the other, "Tom here and me said we wished we could come across you and your mate, in case as how we could give you a bit of a lift, if so be as you wanted it, for we've had plenty ever since."

John thanked the speaker heartily, and informed him that he had done well himself, and was even now on his road to the Commissioner's camp with some gold.

"We are going there ourselves," replied his friends; "we might as well go together. Where's your camp?"

This accession to their strength was a most welcome addition to our prospectors, whose story was listened to with great interest by the off-handed, honest-hearted diggers.

The night passed by quietly, and next morning the travellers prepared to accomplish the remaining distance which lay between them and their destination.

A considerable portion of the road wound through narrow, rocky defiles, hemmed in betwixt precipitous cliffs, and was infested by a tribe of savages whose treacherous ferocity had procured for it a reputation of the very worst description. Many a time the spears of the ambuscaded natives had been dyed red in the heart's blood of the gold-loving invaders of their sterile domains; and notwithstanding all the exertions of the native police stationed in the vicinity, the spot maintained its evil character. The united party, keeping a careful look-out around them, had almost reached the most intricate portion of the stony pass in safety, when wild yells some distance ahead, together with a shot and the shrieks of a white man's voice, warned them that once more the vindictive Myalls were engaged in their bloody work. Drawing their firearms, they pushed rapidly forward, and turning a corner, saw, not far in front of them, a

white man rapidly bounding down the rocks on one side of the road, closely pursued by three or four totally naked aboriginals, who, with terrific yells, hurled their spears at their shrieking victim. Several more of the tribe were congregated on a rock a little higher up, clamorously engaged over some object on the ground. The unexpected arrival of the new-comers, together with half-a-dozen well-directed bullets, had the instant effect of dispersing the natives, of whom in less than a minute there was not a vestige to be seen.

Leaving Ned and one of their diggings friends to look after the man to whose rescue they had so opportunely come, and who now lay in a fainting condition on the ground, John, with the other, climbed towards the rocky shelf where they had noticed the group of aboriginals collected. A fearful object met their eyes. It was the grinning head of him whose lust of gold had impelled him to pursue the owners of the golden heap which had excited his covetousness on the distant creek, and who had evidently selected this difficult gorge with a view of "sticking up" and robbing them, only to fall a prey to the countrymen of the beings he had himself slaughtered with so little compunction. As John West gazed on the dreadful sight before him, awe-struck at the terrible and swift retribution which had overtaken the hardened villain in the midst of his crimes, the likeness which had so puzzled him in life became explained, and it was with a feeling of the deepest horror that he recognised in the pale and death-stricken face the battered, lowering visage of Bill Cane, the murderer of M'Duff. A thick beard, hiding the lower part of his face, had concealed his identity, and produced the alteration which had hitherto proved an effectual disguise. The mutilated trunk lay some distance off, torn and hacked by blunt weapons, and in spite of the short time at their disposal, the eager cannibals had carried away several portions of the body, for what purpose there

was but little doubt. Descending to their companions, they found them engaged in doing what they could for the relief of the unhappy being, who recovered from one fainting fit merely to fall into another. The first glance assured John that it was the miserable Ralf, but so changed, so cadaverous and wretched looking, that Ned, who had not seen him for several years, entirely failed to remember him.

A spear head had penetrated his shoulder, but beyond that no wound could be discovered to account for his prostration. Suddenly, as if recalled by the sound of John West's voice, the eyes of the wounded man opened slowly, and fixing them steadily on the speaker, he seemed animated by a desire to say something. Bending down, West approached his ear to the lips of the miserable creature, and barely distinguished the whisper, "I—did not—want to—kill him," when the relaxed jaw and a rattle in the throat announced that he had passed away,—M'Duff's murder being evidently the subject of his thoughts in this solemn hour. The sudden terror had been too much for him. His enfeebled constitution was unable to bear up against the effects of the shock; and in death, as in life, the brothers in guilt remained unparted.

This awful climax to the lawless lives of the slain men impressed the onlookers greatly, and all felt relieved when the arrival of a body of police, who had been sent for, allowed them to leave the blood-stained pass. But little notice was taken of the event by the public in general. Murder by blacks was too common an occurrence to cause much surprise; and the report of the new field discovered by John West and his mate, together with the amount of gold brought in by them, created an excitement before which everything else paled in interest; and but few days elapsed when, accompanied by the principal Government authorities, and followed by an immense concourse of miners, they returned to the scene of their successful labours.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

EXPLAINS MATTERS IN GENERAL—CONCLUSION.

WILLY FITZGERALD, we have already mentioned, returned to Ungahrun a sadder man than he had left it, and not less sad than puzzled by the events which had occurred around him. He could not account for Ruth's agitation, or for the abrupt and decisive manner with which she had intimated her refusal of his offer. Even now he could scarcely realise that his hopes were for ever at end. He had made so certain of success that the probability of rejection never suggested itself to him. Could it really be the case? He had surely committed some blunder unawares,—perhaps he had offended her womanly sensibilities in some stupid way. He was so utterly deficient in tact. What else could it have been? Then the recollection of her calm, determined manner would rise, bringing with it a sense of hopelessness, and also a touch of bitter indignation and resentment, for poor Fitzgerald had undoubtedly loved honestly and sincerely; and rejection of love is a sore trial to bear. What could have been the matter, too, with John West? He seemed to have gone out of his senses. Everything was at sixes and sevens. He would, however, find his friend at home, and discover that part of the business.

In this, as we know, he was mistaken; and the short note which Blucher handed to him explained nothing; nor could the blackboy, who was as per-

plexed as himself at his master's disappearance, throw much light on the subject. What could have made him behave in so wild and extraordinary a manner on meeting them the day before? Was it possible—and he started as he remembered Ruth's emotion—that she could have been the cause of the remarkable excitement which had disturbed him? Had there been anything between them previously? The question threw a new light over everything,—the place of meeting,—the kneeling posture,—everything seemed to point to the fact: and then his sudden departure.

It accounted for all.

But did Ruth love him? Ah! that question pricked him with sudden sharp pain. It was true that she had never given himself any great encouragement; and he remembered feeling at a loss for a reason why she should at times appear anxious to avoid his company. He had consoled himself at the time by attributing it to her woman's coquetry, and it had piqued his fancy rather than otherwise. What a blind fool he had been! Gradually it dawned on him that he had been inhabiting a fool's paradise; and the more he thought on it, the wider his eyes opened to the truth, and the surer grew the conviction that his rejection was final. His reflections, however, did him good on the whole, for love cannot exist unless it has love to feed upon; and the knowledge that he had wasted his affection on one whose thoughts were bound up in another was as gall and wormwood to his self-love.

Ruth, the unwilling cause of his misery, was by no means very happy herself. She was not at all proud of her conquest. It only added to her embarrassments. She was troubled about her step-father, and troubled about John. Each mail brought worse news than the last from Europe; and in proportion as wool fell in value, so did the sheep which produced it. Daily Mr Cosgrove's affairs grew more hopelessly involved, and

his health worse. Who could have foreseen a few years ago that such a change could have come over the strong, selfish, hard man of the world? The terrible disappointment which his son's career had wrought had given the first great stroke, and from that date forth he had gradually begun to sink. The question of what she should do in the event of his death not infrequently presented itself to Ruth's dismayed mind with appalling intensity. The Berkeleys, it is true, were her blood relations, but they had been so incensed with her election to reside with her step-father, that she could hope for but little sympathy from that quarter; and she knew not where else she could look to. As to John West, Ruth wept with vexation when she remembered the pained despairing expression which had swept over his features as he noticed Fitzgerald bending over her in the earnestness of his entreaty. She had longed to see him once more, and what had come of it? She knew somewhat of his struggling life, and how unwearyingly he had battled for success; and she trembled as she thought what utter despair might urge him to. She bore her troubles, nevertheless, as she had learned to do long ago, with outward calm. Whatever might have been the conflict and distress of her soul, no one knew it.

As for the Grays, they lived very much in the same humdrum style they had done since Bessie's marriage. The fall in sheep considerably affected the old squatter's income; but he had money put by, and owed no man anything, and hoped by strict economy to tide over the crisis which was ruining the money-borrowing sheep-owners all around. Phœbe had seen but little of either Ruth or Fitzgerald since the event which had so greatly disturbed the latter's equanimity; for the former was too busy at home attending to her step-father's ailments, and the latter would rather have gone anywhere at this period than to Betyammo. His self-esteem had been wounded, and he fancied

himself humiliated in the eyes of the world; and somehow he felt as if he could willingly have faced any one rather than Phœbe. She had come out of the struggles which had tried her so bitterly as gold comes from the fire. Her unselfish cheery little spirit arose from the burning flames like a Phœnix from the ashes. She had bravely done battle with herself; and although the old wounds rankled and bled afresh now and again, she went about her household duties with a somewhat unreasoning but fixed belief that whatever is is best, and that everything is ordered for the best, cheering and comforting her parents, and shedding happiness around her.

Stone and Bessie were very comfortable in their new home, and prosperity still smiled upon them. John's sudden disappearance had perplexed Stone exceedingly; and Bessie's mysterious nods and "I could if I woulds" served only to mystify him more. "Now, Bessie," he would say, "you're just like all the rest of your sex. I'm sure you think that some love affair is at the bottom of it; and how on earth was the fellow to fall in love? He hadn't the chance."

Then Bessie would nod her head more sagaciously than ever, and her husband would give up the conundrum in despair. Ruth's rejection of Fitzgerald had by no means taken her by surprise, and, to tell the truth, she rather enjoyed the unexpected discomfiture of her old friend than otherwise. "It won't do him a bit of harm," she frequently told Charley. She was very fond of Ruth, and honoured her for her consistent character and her devotion to her now broken-down step-father, and would willingly have shown her all the kindness that lay in her power, but the distance was too far, and Ruth was tied down to her duties.

At last, however, a day came. On going into Mr Cosgrove's room one morning to inquire for him, Ruth [illegible]covered him sitting by the window-seat, a letter

spread before him on his knees. The bed was unpressed. Startled, she approached, and found him a corpse! The candle by his side was burnt down into the socket. He had evidently been dead some hours. She had long looked forward to the possible occurrence of the event; but still the suddenness took her by surprise, and the shock was a severe one. She had never loved her step-father with the love which most children bestow so unconsciously on their parents; but never having known her own father, and having lived all her life with the dead man, who had treated her even in his successful days with a certain amount of kindness, she could not but grieve for him. Where he was had been a home to her, and latterly he had softened and changed very much in his manner, as he became more infirm and dependent. The letter which had engrossed his latest moments was from his agents, Messrs Bond and Foreclose, and contained an intimation to the effect that the very unsatisfactory nature of his account had compelled them to take the disagreeable step of putting the estate into liquidation, and the dreaded announcement had probably killed him. Mr Gray, who was sent for, came over in the afternoon with Bessie, who had arrived on a visit the day before; and Phœbe and the sisters sympathised with the lonely girl, and carried her off to Betyammo, where Mrs Gray received her like a daughter, and where they made much of her, and consoled her with a hundred womanly little attentions and kindnesses. Mr Gray remained at Cambaranga, setting things in order; and Willy Fitzgerald, on hearing the news, mounted his horse and galloped over too, taking care not to go near the house until he ascertained that Ruth had gone away, after which he stayed, assisting Mr Gray in putting things to rights, and in endeavouring to do what they could. Poor Ruth! they soon saw they could not do much for her. The letter she had herself seen acquainted them with that. There was absolutely

nothing left. Both men knew that Mr Cosgrove's affairs had been long in a bad way, but neither had any idea of their being in so deplorable a state; and Willy Fitzgerald implored Mr Gray to accept a sum of money which would at least keep Ruth from present inconvenience. She might be allowed to believe it came from the estate,—"anything she liked," he urged, "provided she had it;" but old Mr Gray would not hear of such a thing.

"No, no, Fitzgerald, my boy. It won't do. It's like your generous nature; but it won't do — won't do. What if she ever came to know about it? No, no, it won't do. We'll see about her; she'll be all right, make your mind easy."

So having nothing more to do, Fitzgerald rode home, and busied himself about his work, and endeavoured to forget the existence of Ruth Bouverie.

When Bessie left Betyammo, she carried Ruth with her in spite of kind old Mr Gray's entreaties to make their house her home; and Ruth, determined not to eat the bread of idleness, put into execution a little scheme which she had evolved when staying with her friends. She qualified as a Government schoolteacher, and, through Stone's influence, got herself appointed to the little Government school in the township near his property; and on it she expended all her energies, riding in early in the morning, and returning again at sundown, to be a companion to her friend, and gladden the household with her calm, sweet presence.

The public papers had apprised the colony at large of the important discovery which had been made in the shape of a new gold-field, and of the exceedingly rich prizes which some of the fortunate finders had drawn in the great lottery, but as yet John had kept silence about his share of good fortune. He stood almost alone. He had no one to rejoice with him except Stone and his wife,—and the Grays, perhaps;

but they lived too near Ungahrun, and he did not care about going there. He could not bring himself as yet to face Ruth as another man's wife. His success had not come unalloyed by pain. How differently would he have felt a couple of years earlier! Then, perhaps, he might have had a chance against the rich man; but now—now that he cared comparatively little for success, everything went well with him. Ned and he received a considerable money reward from Government, as well as an unusually large area along the line of reef they had opened, and which from the first yielded rich stone. The gold-fields had proved a success; much alluvial gold had been taken out of the ravines and gullies, and many new quartz reefs had been found out, and were being worked. Machinery had been attracted to the field at an early stage, and one of the results of the "crushings" was to fill the pockets of John and his mate over and over again. It was no doubt a great triumph for him, but on the whole he found it wearisome. The excitement was passed away, and he grew sick to death of the bustle and push around him. He sighed once more for the quiet bush-life, the lowing of the peaceful herd, the scent of the trampled sweet marjoram, and the blood-stirring gallop through the pleasant pasture-lands. The memory of former days grew irresistibly strong. There was nothing to detain him. Ned, who had become a person of considerable importance, undertook the management of the claim, so, saddling his horse one morning, he abruptly took leave of his friends, including the "lucky mates," whose favouring genius had enabled them to secure the adjacent ground to his own, and who were in a fair way to become independent for life, and started south for Brisbane, whence he made his way up to visit Stone and Bessie.

It was a soft pleasant evening, and Stone, who had been round the stables and outhouse buildings, super-

intending personally the feeding and watering of a number of choice young pedigree stock, came up and joined Bessie, as she stood on the grass-plot in front of the house, nursing her baby. It was her second child, and the first, a sturdy little man, ran to meet his father, clamouring for a ride upon his shoulder.

"Come along, then, old fellow," said Stone, lifting him up; "we'll go and meet Ruth, and you shall ride back with her."

As he opened the little garden-gate leading down the road he became aware of a horseman riding towards the house.

"Holloa, Bessie!" he remarked, calling attention to the fact, "we are going to have company to-night."

"Who can it be, I wonder?"

"No idea: some stranger, I suppose."

Nearer and nearer the horseman drew, until at last, springing from his horse amid loud exclamations of delight and surprise, John West stood beside them, shaking hands and answering a hundred questions.

Indeed, so busy and excited were they all, that no one noticed Ruth as she rode up, and, dismounting, entered the little gate, but Mr Stone, junior, who set up a shout of welcome.

"Do you know who this is?" inquired Bessie.

West turned round, and his heart stood almost still with the suddenness of the start.

"Don't you remember Ruth Bouverie?" said Stone, hastily.

"Ruth *Bouverie?*" returned John, with an unmistakable emphasis on the surname, and an ashen face, which caused that of the person in question to grow a deep crimson.

"Yes, of course; what else?" answered the settler, going over to his wife, who had been making a series of telegraphic signals to him, and accompanying her inside the house, leaving Ruth and John standing together on the grass-plot

"What is the matter, Bessie?" asked the mystified man. "Anything wrong?"

"No," she said, laughing; "only you are such a great stupid, and can't see one inch before you. I always told you I knew more than I cared to tell about the cause of John's disappearance, didn't I?"

"Whew!" whistled Stone. "Oh! that's it, is it? and my lord here was jealous of Fitzgerald and——"

"Something of that sort," returned Bessie. "That's all right now, though, thank goodness; and mother says that Willy has got over the disappointment completely, and is more there than ever. Now you know, and just leave them to themselves. They'll be all right directly."

And apparently knowing, shrewd-witted Bessie was right, for that evening at supper John West's face wore a beaming look of happiness, such as had not lighted it for many a day, while Ruth, filled with sweet content, listened to the narrative of his adventures with mingled pity and amazement, weeping at the last tears of sorrow over the fate of the unhappy Ralf, with a sincere grief which was undeserved.

But little now remains to be told. Yielding to his inclinations, John West purchased a compact, well-grassed cattle station in a favourite part of the country, where, surrounded by pleasant neighbours, he literally lives under the shade of his own fig-tree, and drinks the juice of his own grape. Ruth, now his wife, moves about, imparting to everything a feminine grace and elegance, with a magical touch, which to her husband is simply marvellous; and as he rests his eye on her figure, and the fragrant blossoms of the flower-garden, which it is her special delight to tend, the recollection of days of unrewarded toil, and misery, and danger, fades away, as does an unsubstantial dream of the night before the brightness of the golden morning.

As already related, Fitzgerald recovered his sound-

ness of heart, but not for long. His renewed intercourse with the Grays brought him once more into contact with Phœbe, and day by day he became more and more impressed with her charming character and sterling qualities, until at last, wondering how he could have been so blind as to prefer any one before her, he begged her to become his wife. For some months Phœbe held out, in order, as she said, to give him time to know his own mind, but eventually yielding to his repeated solicitations, she consented, and the new house at Ungahrun opened its doors to receive a throng of rejoicing friends and neighbours, eager to welcome the advent of its new mistress.

Desmard is succeeding well as a squatter out west, his father having advanced a sufficient sum to purchase a share in what will, with time, become a valuable station.

Ned has developed into a machine owner, and bids fair to become one of the largest mining capitalists in the colony.

THE END.

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